

THE GREAT ESCAPE: AN ANALYSIS OF ALLIED ACTIONS LEADING
TO THE AXIS EVACUATION OF SICILY IN WORLD WAR II

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ABSTRACT

THE GREAT ESCAPE: AN ANALYSIS OF ALLIED ACTIONS LEADING TO THE AXIS EVACUATION OF SICILY IN WORLD WAR II, by Maj Barton V. Barnhart, 90 pages.

As Allied armies advanced in North Africa, Allied leadership established Sicily as the next target. As the invasion unfolded, the Allies pushed Axis forces into northeastern Sicily where a well-organized evacuation moved over 100,000 Axis troops, with equipment, to the Italian mainland. The central research question is: Did an opportunity exist for the Allies to trap and compel the capitulation of Axis forces during the Sicily campaign? Analysis of the invasion decision, the planning cycle, and the operation resulted in several conclusions. First, strategic guidance adequately promoted successful planning. Second, operational planning was disjointed and lacked senior ground commander involvement. Finally, Generals Eisenhower and Alexander did not communicate to their field army commanders a campaign strategic vision or commander's intent, which led to two decisions that eliminated the possibility to trap Axis forces. Additionally, the newness of combined operational practices and differences in command relationships caused coordination problems that hindered operational responsiveness. Though Sicily was a tactical success, the Allies missed an opportunity to capture a substantial Axis force, which demonstrates the importance of commander's vision and intent, cultivating unity of command in an allied environment and preserving the ability to exploit favorable conditions with an eye toward operational goals.

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ACRONYMS

AA	Anit-aircraft
AEF	Allied Expeditionary Force
AOR	Area of Responsibility
CCS	Combined Chiefs of Staff
E-boat	German motor torpedo boat
OKW	Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (the German high command)
OPD	Operations Division of the U.S. Army staff
U-boat	German submarine

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND

The World War II battle for the Italian island of Sicily ended early on 17 August 1943, as German and Italian forces completed a successful evacuation to the Italian mainland. The thirty-eight day campaign, also known as Operation Husky, fought by the Allied Expeditionary Force (AEF) against Axis forces proved to be a masterful Axis use of terrain and defensive tactics that frustrated Allied efforts to quickly take the island. Indeed, the Allied attack surprised even German commanders in its scattering of forces throughout the island and the apparent absence of a concerted effort to envelope and cut off the German forces.¹ Allied soldiers fought hard throughout the Sicilian campaign and won a great tactical victory, but many questions must be asked concerning the Axis evacuation and whether or not the Allies seriously considered the possibility of trapping the three German fighting divisions employed on the island as well as those Italian soldiers that chose to fight.

This thesis will review the Sicilian campaign from the perspective of both the Allies and the Axis with an eye toward the key decisions leading up to the escape of a significant fighting force that the Allies would face again on the Italian mainland. Finally, the thesis will answer the primary research question: Did an opportunity exist for the Allies to trap and compel the capitulation of Axis forces during the Sicily campaign? Answering this question will require an analysis of the decision process whereby Allied political and military leaders chose to invade Sicily, it will require a review of key

activities and decisions made during the planning cycle, and it will require an analysis of the operation itself focusing on major decisions leading to the evacuation.

The Axis Situation

At the beginning of the battle for Sicily the Germans had roughly 30,000 troops arrayed in two mobile divisions (the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division and the Hermann Goering Division) that eventually formed the 14th Panzer Corps, commanded by General Hans Valentin Hube.² The Germans later added most of the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division and elements of the 1st Parachute Division to the forces defending Sicily.

The Italians had approximately 200,000 troops (some estimates place the number as high as 325,000) arrayed in two corps consisting of four mobile divisions (the 4th (Livorno) Division, the 28th (Aosta) Division, the 26th (Assietta) Division, and the 54th (Napoli) Division), five coastal divisions, two coastal brigades, a coastal regiment, two port defense groups, and several mobile and tactical groups. Together, these units formed the Italian Sixth Army under the command of General Alfredo Guzzoni, who, in his additional capacity as the commanding general of the Axis' Armed Forces Command Sicily, technically exercised operational command over Hube's 14th Panzer Corps.³ Appendix A shows the organization of Axis forces for the defense of Sicily.

Though sixty-six years old, Guzzoni was still an able commander who possessed solid tactical judgment and had a reputation for knowing what he was doing and for pursuing it with determination. He was also one of the few senior Italian officers who maintained sound relations with the Germans. He had retired from the army in 1941, but the *Comando Supremo* (the Italian Army High Command) called him out of retirement to assume responsibility for the defense of Sicily on 20 May 1943. After his arrival he

quickly became aware of the poor training, equipment, and morale in the Italian units on Sicily and believed the best defensive option involved using the German divisions to deliver a crushing counterattack to the Allied invaders while they were still near the beaches and vulnerable. Guzzoni also understood the tenuous position he was in concerning his relationship with the German tactical commanders including the Supreme Commander in the Mediterranean (the *Oberbefehlshaber Süd*, or OB South), Field Marshall Albert Kesselring. If it came down to it, Guzzoni knew Kesselring held the real power. Events would later show that had Kesselring accepted Guzzoni's counsel on the positioning of the German counterattack force, that is, both German divisions in the southeast vice one in the southeast and one in the west, events on Sicily might have had a much different outcome.⁴

On paper, Axis forces looked formidable, but much apprehension existed in the German high command (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, or OKW) concerning the reliability of the Italian units. The Italian soldiers on Sicily were ill equipped, poorly-trained, and led by officers and noncommissioned officers whose loyalty was to Italy, not Fascism, and certainly not to Germany. Lieutenant General Fridolin von Senger und Etterlin, hereafter known as von Senger, the German liaison officer at Italian Sixth Army headquarters, later said the Italians did not fight, nor were they able to fight, because their coastal divisions had no modern combat equipment, and their mobile divisions had received no new equipment since Italy's entry into the war.⁵ Indeed, the coastal formations were static units organized to defend the coast and generally consisted of older men, approximately seventy-five percent of whom were locals. Their equipment consisted of antiquated armament, horse drawn artillery, inadequate antitank weapons,

and no naval guns. Their principle weapons were automatic rifles and machine guns. The Germans suspected these units would be of low combat value, and this result was clearly proven on the day of the invasion, D day, 10 July 1943.⁶

The dilemma faced by the Italian soldier was a curious one, for defending Sicily meant defending Fascism--and few of them wanted to do that. They believed the “right” side was the Allied side, not the Fascist or German one, and were purposely looking for the best opportunity to stop shooting at an enemy they actually considered their friend. They struggled on, though, at least for a time because their “ally,” the Germans, and some of their countrymen, though Fascists, continued to fight. Stuck in what they considered a hopeless situation, most Italian soldiers thought it ridiculous to fight and die for a cause they no longer believed in. During the battle most of them simply abandoned their positions and went into hiding or allowed the Allies to capture them without a fight.⁷

These concerns left Kesselring in a difficult position. Though he agreed with Guzzoni that the Allies would attack in southeastern Sicily, he could not rule out an attack in the west. Additionally, because of the possibility of a betrayal and wholesale surrender by the Italians, Kesselring chose to disperse German forces in such a manner that they could counterattack against an Allied landing in the south or the west *and* disarm the Italians in the event they defected. He thus placed most of the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division in the west, while deploying the Hermann Goering Division in the southeast.⁸

Overview of Allied Moves

The principal Allied units involved in the Sicilian campaign were the U.S. Seventh Army commanded by Lieutenant General George S. Patton Jr., and the British

Eighth Army commanded by General Sir Bernard Law Montgomery. The overall commander of Allied forces was American General Dwight D. Eisenhower, and British General Sir Harold Alexander was Allied commander for ground operations; Patton and Montgomery worked for Alexander. Additionally, at the Casablanca Conference in January the Allied Combined Chiefs of Staff (CCS) decreed that Alexander, through Eisenhower, would lead the detailed Husky planning effort and execute the operation at the proper time.⁹ Appendix B shows the organization of Allied forces for Operation Husky.

Attacking on the southeast corner of Sicily the two Allied armies, the British assuming the main effort along the Sicilian east coast and the Americans protecting their left flank, pushed northward toward the cities of Syracuse, Catania, and Messina (see appendix C, Allied invasion map and Axis dispositions). Despite success in the early days of the operation, chiefly due to a lack of resistance on the part of the Italian divisions, Eighth Army soon found itself facing tough German resistance and in a tactical stalemate on the plains of Catania along highway 114 near the Primosole Bridge. On 17 July while Eighth Army struggled in the east, Patton paid a surprise visit to Alexander at Tunis and pressed for approval for a move by Seventh Army on the northwest Sicilian city of Palermo. Alexander acquiesced and on 19 July the drive to Palermo commenced.¹⁰

Patton's forces liberated Palermo on 22 July, but on the twentieth Alexander had changed the boundary between Seventh and Eighth Armies and issued new instructions to Patton. After capturing Palermo, Seventh Army was to employ maximum strength in a drive eastward along highway 113 (the north coast highway) and highway 120, which was the next main east-west road about 10 miles south of highway 113. Eighth Army was

to continue to attempt to break the stalemate along the east coast and, together, both armies were to converge on Messina and finish off the remaining Axis forces.¹¹

The Evacuation

As the Allies continued their drive toward Messina, Kesselring knew he had a serious weakness in Calabria and southern Italy, where he had only small alarm units and one division spread thinly across a wide area. An attack in these areas could cut off and trap the entire 14th Panzer Corps on Sicily and open the door for an allied advance to the northern Apennines. He requested reinforcements so that he might have at least adequate forces to defend the toe of Italy and the west coast up through the Naples-Salerno area. Kesselring felt with these actions he could tie up eleven or twelve Allied divisions.¹²

Colonel General Alfred Jodl, chief of the OKW *Wehrmachtfuehrungsstab* (the operations section) did not agree with Kesselring's optimism in tying down the allies on Sicily. Jodl looked at the situation from the opposite view that the Allies in Sicily were tying down German divisions. He felt that the existing Axis lack of forces in southern Italy merited an immediate withdrawal not only from Sicily, but from southern Italy as well.¹³

OKW and Kesselring both knew that to avoid the disastrous losses that befell the Germans in Tunisia they would have to prepare early to evacuate whatever forces they could. Consequently, on 26 July, OKW issued an order to Kesselring directing preparations for an eventual evacuation of Sicily. The order also directed Kesselring not to inform the Italians of German intentions to evacuate at that time. On 27 July, Kesselring directed his chief of staff to call a conference with German commanders where he briefed the planned conduct of future operations on the island. Kesselring

noted, “If the Italians should leave the alliance with Germany, the 14th Panzer Corps will immediately disengage from the enemy and evacuate all troops from Sicily. Preparations for the evacuation will start right away in coordination between 14th and 76th Panzer Corps and other headquarters involved.”¹⁴

Based on Kesselring’s direction, Hube ordered Colonel Ernst Guenther Baade, the commandant of the Strait of Messina, and the German Sea Transport Leader (*Seetransportfuehrer*) Messina Strait, Captain Gustav von Liebenstein, to begin preparations for the evacuation.¹⁵

On 28 May, von Liebenstein assumed his position (two months before Kesselring’s direction to prepare for evacuation) and found an inefficient and chaotic operation. There were several large commercial steam ferries that could each carry as many as twenty-five rail cars between Messina and two primary termini on the mainland side, but von Liebenstein knew these ferries and their terminals were extremely vulnerable to Allied air, sea, and land attack. Fortunately, the German officers realized this before von Liebenstein arrived and had prudently acquired a variety of smaller coastal vessels to use on three dispersed routes outside the normal ferry routes. While a step in the right direction, von Liebenstein knew it would not be enough. Additionally, he found that the Luftwaffe and the army engineer construction battalion that serviced the ports each had their own ferry “fleets,” but operated them independently with complete disregard of each other’s requirements.¹⁶

Von Liebenstein quickly made two important changes that would literally save the day for the 14th Panzer Corps during the evacuation. First, he reorganized these disparate flotillas into a single efficient ferry service that increased its daily capacity

nearly ten-fold in its ability to transport men, supplies, and equipment. Secondly, he increased the number of German primary ferry routes from three to five operating from twelve separate locations on the Messina side and twelve locations on the mainland. He also oversaw construction of more efficient docking facilities and road networks to service the landing points. He instituted what may arguably be the first roll-on/roll-off system of cargo movement; his system operated so efficiently that his port handlers could pack as many as twelve fully loaded supply trucks onto a ferry in as little as twenty minutes.¹⁷

The result of von Liebenstein's modifications was a ferry service with plenty of built-in redundancy, ready to quickly and efficiently move large assemblies of troops and equipment across the Messina Strait. Combined with the Italian ferry service consisting of four ferry routes that by August had achieved a level of efficiency rivaling that of the Germans, the sea-transport pieces to ensure a successful evacuation were in place. The ferry services needed this built-in redundancy to act as a counterbalance to frequent Allied air raids on both sides of the strait. Fortunately for the Axis, Kesselring had the foresight to address this issue also when on 14 July he appointed Colonel Baade to the new post of German Commandant, Messina Strait. Baade had a reputation as a maverick infantry officer who shared many characteristics with the beloved commander of the U.S. 1st Infantry Division, Major General Terry de la Mesa Allen.¹⁸ More importantly, Baade was an exceptionally able officer in whom Kesselring had much confidence.

Baade's primary task was to defend the evacuation points and sea-lanes from Allied air raids. He was also charged with providing the means to carry out the evacuation. Kesselring gave Baade sweeping powers to accomplish these important

missions and Baade accomplished them with what can only be termed stunning efficiency. He appeared to overlook no small detail and provided virtually everything conceivably necessary for the evacuation to include caches of food, brandy, and cigarettes on the mainland for the troops leaving Sicily.¹⁹

Baade's authority allowed him to reorganize and strengthen the strait's antiaircraft (AA) defenses. He established six flak sectors, three on each side of the strait, made up of sixty AA units. This added up to eighty-two heavy and sixty light AA guns on the mainland side, and forty-one heavy and fifty-two light AA guns on the Sicilian side.²⁰ Baade also positioned over 150 mobile, dual-purpose, guns (of the three inch and four inch variety) along the shoreline for additional firepower against both aircraft and naval threats. He addressed the potentiality of sea attack with four batteries of Italian 280 millimeter (eleven inch) guns, two batteries of Italian 152 millimeter (six inch) guns, and, later commandeered from the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division, a four-gun battery of German 170 millimeter (6.7 inch) guns.²¹

The combination of von Liebenstein's ferry service and Baade's evacuation plan and AA protection on both sides of the Strait guaranteed Axis forces had a fighting chance to escape Sicily, provided the Allied armies didn't break through German defense lines too quickly or the Allied air forces did not close the Messina Strait area. Fortunately, from the German perspective, neither of these critical events happened.

In *Bitter Victory*, Carlo D'Este points out that the German evacuation took place in four discernable stages, the first two of which were actually accomplished before Kesselring's 27 July direction to Hube (who further directed Baade and von Liebenstein) to prepare for the evacuation. The first stage began almost immediately after the 10 July

Allied invasion as the Germans ordered all nonessential units to leave the island. Though Baade's plan was sound in concept the execution, at least in this first stage, proved complex and the result was a monumental traffic jam near Messina along route 113 (the main route along the north coast from Palermo to Messina) that took German military police two days to untangle. Fortunately for the Germans, Allied fighter planes did not detect the chaos along route 113.²²

The second stage involved the evacuation of western Sicily, which began when Patton kicked off his Palermo offensive on 19 July. His advance was so rapid the Germans evacuated only a small amount of material from Palermo, primarily the equipment from four radar stations, before attacks from Allied fighter-bombers precluded any further attempt to evacuate equipment. Among the critical Axis losses resulting from the fall of Palermo were an estimated 10,000 tons of fuel.²³

Shortly after Palermo fell on 22 July, Kesselring's chief of staff conducted the 27 July conference that spurred Baade to action in creation of the evacuation plan. Baade quickly worked out the details and, on 2 August, Kesselring approved the plan and asked only that he be notified before Hube implemented the plan. The next day Kesselring informed OKW that the evacuation plan was ready.²⁴

Baade's plan, known by the Germans as "*Lehrgang*," was simple in that it was based on the premise of moving the troops first, followed by as much ammunition, supplies, and other equipment as possible. The real difficulty was in phasing the withdrawal of troops and equipment to avoid the type of chaos and exposure to Allied aircraft that resulted along route 113 during the Palermo evacuation.

Prior to the *Lehrgang* plan an understandable mood of pessimism existed within the 14th Panzer Corps, as few senior officers believed they could pull off a miracle and escape. With the surrender of the Axis Afrika Korps fresh in their minds, most believed that few would escape Sicily. Von Liebenstein, though, bluntly told Hube that he could evacuate up to 12,500 men every twenty-four hours and planned to take all their equipment as well.²⁵

To give Baade and von Liebenstein the best chance for success, Hube devised a phased withdrawal plan for his combat forces based on five defensive lines, each which declined in length across wedge-shaped northeastern Sicily, and converged on Messina. Hube's five defensive lines were in addition to a sixth defensive line defined by Hitler, the San Stefano line, which was the initial withdrawal point for Axis forces. Appendix D shows major force movements throughout the campaign and the six defensive lines. Beginning from the Etna line, as German forces reached each successive line, approximately 8,000-10,000 troops would make their way to von Liebenstein's designated ferry sites according to Baade's *Lehrgang* plan.²⁶

By 4 August the Allied pressure at Troina and Adrano along the Etna (or San Fratello) line had grown to the point where Hube ordered the evacuation of all units that could be spared, thus beginning the third stage of the German evacuation. It was a somewhat risky decision because even though Kesselring had left the door open for Hube to order the evacuation on his own initiative, OKW had given specific instructions that the evacuation was not to begin without their permission. This direction from OKW did not surprise Hube as he was well aware of Hitler's penchant for not wishing to inform German troops when withdrawal was imminent based on the belief that they would fight

better if deprived of any notion that retreat was a possibility. Hube, on the other hand, believed it essential that his troops have hope they would not be sacrificed and, though he was not at liberty to openly tell his corps, he made sure by indirect means that his men knew of the pending evacuation.²⁷

Adrano, the key defensive position on the eastern portion of the Etna line, and held by the Hermann Goering Division, finally fell to the British 78th Division on the night of 6 August. Hube's defenders began the retreat to their second well-prepared defensive line, the Tortorici line, and on 10 August Hube ordered commencement of the fourth and final stage of the evacuation.²⁸ The plan called for the Hermann Goering Division to leave Sicily first, followed by the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division and finally the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division.

By this time the Allies were well aware that Axis forces were evacuating the island and began round-the-clock bombing missions of targets in the Messina Strait. The obvious purpose of the attacks was to prevent resupply of the remaining Axis defenders and to strike at the main evacuation points. Allied airmen flew nearly 1,300 bomber and fighter sorties from 31 July through 10 August and reported they sank or set on fire several ferries and barges, and scored near misses on numerous other smaller vessels. The Germans, on the other hand, reported the loss of only one ferry, one landing craft, and three other vessels.²⁹

As the Hermann Goering Division backed away from the Etna line and began its withdrawal to von Leibenstein's evacuation flotilla, there was considerable division of opinion between von Liebenstein and Hube's planners at 14th Panzer Corps, who mistakenly assumed evacuation operations could only take place during darkness.

However, the opposite was actually true, and although the Allies continued their round-the-clock air raids, the Germans found that most problems with the evacuation actually occurred during night operations. Keeping Allied fighter planes at bay meant using no illumination at night except the moon, and this posed myriad problems to von Liebenstein's crews both for loading operations and for sailing operations. What the Germans found was that night operations proved far less effective than those performed during the light of day. Additionally, after only a few days von Liebenstein noted that the Allies carried out the majority of their heavy bombing attacks on both sides of the Messina Strait between the hours of 9:00 P.M. and dawn. This increased already difficult night operations immensely. Von Liebenstein, however, noticed that there were very few substantial air attacks during the day and these were fended off using Baade's extensive AA network.³⁰

With experience, night evacuation operations began to improve dramatically. On the night of 14 August von Liebenstein actually had to suspend operations at 1:00 A.M. (on 15 August) as there were no further men or equipment ready for evacuation. Von Liebenstein's promise to Hube of moving 12,500 men per twenty-four hour period was hampered only by the lack of that many troops per day to evacuate.³¹

Baade had originally scheduled *Lehrgang* to last five days from 11 August through 15 August, but because Baade's and von Liebenstein's operations became so efficient Hube ordered it extended an additional day to complete the withdrawal of all possible German equipment. By morning on 16 August, all but the rearguard elements defending along the final defense line had safely left Sicily. What many senior German

officers thought would be a disastrous undertaking had turned into a stunning success story.³²

Though Allied aircraft were flying against targets in and near the Messina Strait, they did not make a concerted effort to stem the flow of evacuation until the final three days of *Lehrgang*. Even with this concerted effort, over 550 Allied fighter and bomber sorties resulted in zero losses to the Axis evacuation fleet. In fact, according to von Liebenstein's meticulous war diary, only one German soldier was killed during Allied aerial attacks throughout the entire evacuation.³³ All told, the Germans managed to evacuate over 54,000 soldiers, nearly 10,000 vehicles of various types, over fifty tanks, over 160 guns, over 1,800 tons of ammunition and fuel, and nearly 17,000 tons of equipment.³⁴

Though the German evacuation is certainly a complete success story, the concurrent evacuation operation accomplished by the Italians was equally successful. General Guzzoni, despite a combative attitude that suggested at least some Italians would fight until the end, directed the Italian Naval Commander in Sicily, Rear Admiral Pietro Barone, to prepare to evacuate Italian troops beginning 3 August. Barone pressed several vessels into service and, like the Germans, quickly prepared to move large quantities of men and equipment to the mainland. Barone used different ports than the Germans, and one of them in particular, Taormina, was in close proximity to where British warships were operating. However, there was virtually no interference and when the Italian evacuation ended on 16 August, they had moved an estimated 50,000 Italian troops, 3,000 sailors, 227 vehicles, forty-one artillery pieces and twelve mules.³⁵

The German evacuation ended on the morning of 17 August as the last ferries left Messina with the last of the rearguard troops at about 6:00 A.M. As the Italians completed their evacuation they set mines to blow up what remained of the port. Hube stayed right until the end, in accordance with German military tradition, and was one of the last to leave. Colonel Bogislaw von Bonin, Kesselring's chief of staff, later summed up German feelings on the evacuation with the following words:

We had more than enough retreats [during the war], but through the fault of our higher command, they almost never ended gloriously. Every German soldier on Sicily, however, who after weeks of fighting and tremendous effort, reached the mainland in the middle of August with his weapons, artillery, vehicles and other equipment, could understand what deep truth there is in the term "glorious retreat." After five and a half weeks of battle on an island against an enemy who, in ground forces alone, had four times our numbers, who, in supplies and equipment, was still superior to us; an enemy who had absolute superiority on sea and in the air. The three German divisions, on 17 August, were again on the mainland, ready and equipped to be committed in battle.³⁶

The last Axis troops to leave Sicily, an eight-man Italian patrol, were lifted to the mainland by a German assault boat at about 8:30 A.M.

Allied forces never seriously threatened Axis evacuation efforts. To do so would have taken a thoroughly coordinated effort by Allied ground, naval, and air forces as the rugged, mountainous terrain of Sicily favored Axis defenders right to the end. The few roads that lead to Messina, in fact only two, were easily defended as mines, booby traps and demolitions took their toll on advancing Allied ground forces, thus the use of naval and air forces would have been critical if the evacuation was to be stopped.

The Axis escape from Sicily leads to many questions, chiefly, could it have been prevented, and, if so, how? As von Bonin's comments point out, the three German divisions (and parts of a fourth) that escaped were now ready to conduct combat

operations on the mainland. It is incredible that a serious attempt by the Allies to trap the Axis divisions was not made, and one is left wondering why senior American and British leaders apparently did not grasp the opportunity. It points to a potential problem in the lack of experience and training of senior Allied ground commanders to actively seek and prepare to trap a substantial Axis force. Earlier in the war the Germans had taken advantage of opportunities to cut off and defeat large pockets of enemy forces. The Russians consequently learned to do the same thing, as evidenced by the battle at Stalingrad. Though the Allies had trapped the Afrika Korps and forced its capitulation in Tunisia, it is arguable that had the means existed to escape (as it did on Sicily), the Afrika Korps might have gotten away also. It appears as if the Allies were not really paying attention, at least at this period in time, to the lessons that could have been learned from earlier campaigns.

One may wonder how the decision was made to invade Sicily in the first place. After all, Husky began only a short time after the conclusion of operations in Tunisia. The decision to invade Sicily came out of the Casablanca Conference of January 1943, and it is noteworthy to mention that at that time the victory in North Africa was not yet a foregone conclusion. This influenced the planning of Husky. However, it is also understandable on the part of the Allies that they must plan for success. The question was, after Torch, where to go next? The decision to take Sicily was not an easy one, and as will be pointed out there was much debate between the United States and United Kingdom on where the next operation should commence.

¹Donald S. Detwiler, ed., *World War II German Military Studies*, vol. 14, *Concluding Remarks of the Mediterranean Campaign*, by Field Marshal Albert Kesselring (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1979), 37.

²Albert N. Garland, Howard McGaw Smyth, and Martin Blumenson, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1965), 81-82.

³*Ibid.*, 84.

⁴*Ibid.*, 86.

⁵Carlo D'Este, *Bitter Victory* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1988), 554.

⁶Garland, Smyth, and Blumenson, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 80.

⁷D'Este, *Bitter Victory*, 554-555.

⁸Garland, Smyth, and Blumenson, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 86.

⁹Paul Kesaris, ed., *Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; Part 1: 1942-1945; The European Theater* (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1981), microfilm, 4:20.

¹⁰Garland, Smyth, and Blumenson, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 236.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 304.

¹²*Ibid.*, 368.

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 374.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶D'Este, *Bitter Victory*, 498.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 500.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 501.

¹⁹C. J. C. Molony et al., *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, vol. 5, (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1973), 166.

²⁰Ibid., 165.

²¹D'Este, *Bitter Victory*, 502.

²²Ibid., 503.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Garland, Smyth, and Blumenson, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 374.

²⁵D'Este, *Bitter Victory*, 505.

²⁶Garland, Smyth, and Blumenson, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 377.

²⁷D'Este, *Bitter Victory*, 504-505.

²⁸Garland, Smyth, and Blumenson, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 377.

²⁹D'Este, *Bitter Victory*, 508.

³⁰Ibid., 512.

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid., 512-514.

³³Ibid., 514.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid., 515.

³⁶Ibid., 516.

CHAPTER 2

THE DECISION TO INVADE SICILY

The Axis Viewpoint

When informed of the 7 December 1941 Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor, Adolf Hitler was not surprised. Though he did not know the exact date the Japanese would strike, he knew they intended to because in the first few days of December the Japanese had asked he and Italy's Mussolini if they too would declare war on the United States should Japan become involved in such a conflict. Germany and Italy both responded positively.¹

In the years before the Japanese attack, Hitler's views of the United States had changed from favorable to utter disregard. In the late 1920s, his attention was drawn to the United States chiefly by the success of its automobile industry, which despite high wages and the great distance from Europe was obviously successful in European markets. Additionally, Hitler viewed America as a product of emigration from Europe, and ultimately, the great meeting place of the Nordic race, who were now protecting their racial purity by excluding Asiatics and by other immigration legislation. He did not see America as a melting pot, but as a homogeneous country, a gathering of the finest Nordic racial stock from each European country. In Hitler's mind this explained why Americans made such good use of their living space and led to his belief that Americans were exceedingly dangerous people.²

Then, the world economic situation during the great depression served as a catalyst that changed Hitler's view of the United States. Seeing the film *Grapes of Wrath*

several times had a stark impact on him, and he began to view the version of America put forth in the film as representative of the United States as a whole. Also, he began to view the United States as a racially mixed society, inclusive of Negroes and Jews, which in his mind made it a deteriorating society;³ one whose soldiers were no match for his battle-hardened veterans, and whose civilian leadership was a group of “nitwits.” At the outbreak of war between Germany and the United States, Hitler’s views remained unchanged. Initial German success at Kasserine Pass reinforced his new line of thought, but curiously, the ultimate German defeat in Tunisia did nothing to change his views.⁴

Mussolini followed Hitler’s lead and declared war on the U.S. on 11 December. In thoughts very similar to Hitler, Mussolini regarded America as a stupid and uncultured nation, a second rate power whose industrial might was a hoax, and whose military importance was insignificant.⁵ With these thoughts by Axis political leadership it is not hard to see why, coupled with huge Axis successes to date, they believed the end of the war could be in sight, though recent setbacks should have caused concern and a possible reassessment of objectives.

In reality, the tide of the war was already turning against the Axis. In the summer and fall of 1940, the German Luftwaffe had failed to break the Royal Air Force in the Battle of Britain resulting in Hitler’s abandonment of a possible invasion of Britain (Operation Sealion). Early December of 1941 marked the point where the Red Army followed up their success at Rostov by seizing the initiative all along the eastern front. The retreat of Field Marshal Rommel’s Afrika Korps in North Africa to its March 1941 starting point on the edge of the Gulf of Sidra occurred nearly simultaneously. Still, Hitler did not reassess the direction of the war effort until after he declared war on the

United States, which was a decision he made on his own with no input from OKW. For their part, OKW saw a gloomy future ahead, one in which the best that could be hoped for was to escape being crushed between two enemies in east and west whose combined war potential was significantly greater than their own.⁶

As 1942 came to a close the Allies had kicked off their invasion of the north coast of Africa, Operation Torch. From this point forward the Axis situation in North Africa generally deteriorated until the final collapse in May 1943. As far back as December 1942, as the German hold on Stalingrad slipped away in the east, Hitler had toyed with the idea of a complete evacuation from North Africa; Rommel had appealed to him in late November with just such a request. In fact, on Hitler's direction, OKW had sent Kesselring a series of questions on the sea transport situation that hinted at far-reaching decisions depending on Kesselring's answers, but Kesselring's assessment of the situation in North Africa was more optimistic than Rommel's.⁷ Though Hitler himself believed Kesselring tended to be overly optimistic in his assessments,⁸ no action was taken to evacuate North Africa.

Only a smattering of records remain of conversations between Hitler and his OKW staff during this timeframe, but Walter Warlimont's *Inside Hitler's Headquarters*, Gerhard Weinberg's *World in the Balance*, and Felix Gilbert's *Hitler Directs His War*, provide a good flavor of the attitude of Hitler and the OKW staff. Though occasional mentions of the Mediterranean situation are evident, most of Hitler's attention, as well as that of the OKW staff, was focused on the huge effort along the eastern front. Even after the surrender at Stalingrad, the Germans looked to regain the initiative against the Red

Army, and thus when the situation in the Mediterranean came up, discussion usually centered on the possibility of Italy defecting from the Axis.

The Axis defeat in North Africa opened the Mediterranean theater for further Allied operations and threatened the very core of the Axis alliance as Mussolini's control of Italy became more and more suspect. On Hitler's direction the OKW Operations Staff examined likely consequences of Italy withdrawing from the war. The staff came to the conclusion that the Balkans were the most likely Allied target as the coasts were barely defended, the population was in revolt, and the area contained valuable raw materials. It also offered the possibility of entering the Continent from the southeast. As initial Allied objectives, the staff believed the large Italian islands along with southern and possibly central Italy, would provide a springboard for a Balkan push. To defend against this the Germans began pushing reinforcements toward Sicily, and to a lesser extent Sardinia and Corsica.⁹

The Early Days of the Allied Alliance

Though the general tide of the war in Europe was turning away from the Axis, the British and American alliance was off to a tough start. After Pearl Harbor, the Americans were not sure where the Japanese would strike next, and it would be June 1942 before the American victory at Midway reversed the trend in the Pacific. The British, who had experienced defeat after defeat since April 1940, would experience it yet again at Singapore in February 1942. Additionally, German submarines continued to sink Allied shipping in the Atlantic at a pace faster than could be replaced. Thus, as 1942 began, the Allies did not have great cause for optimism at their overall situation in both the Pacific and in Europe.

To further complicate matters the Americans and the British each had their own ideas as to what actions the Alliance should take in the future. The British believed action in the Far East was out of the question for the foreseeable future, as was action to reenter the European continent. Only in the Mediterranean did they believe the possibility existed to reverse the tide of Axis success. But even this would prove extremely difficult, as by July 1942 the Afrika Korps had the Eighth Army backed up to the final obstacle to Egypt, Alam Halfa.¹⁰ It would not be until August when Prime Minister Churchill's appointments of General Alexander as the new Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, and General Montgomery as the new commander of Eighth Army, that British fortune would finally turn for the better.

American focus was on the defeat of Germany, the so-called Europe first strategy, as agreed to by President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill at the Arcadia conference of 22 December 1941 through 14 January 1942, in Washington, D.C. The question then became the best way to defeat the Axis. General George C. Marshall, Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, gave the task of answering that question to then Brigadier General Eisenhower, who had just taken over the War Plans Division (reorganized in March of 1942 as the Operations Division, or OPD) on the Army Staff. Eisenhower and his planners considered several options to include an attack through Norway, an attack through the Iberian Peninsula, even an attack through the Mediterranean. What they finally settled on and presented to Marshall and the other U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff as the way forward was a cross-channel invasion into France. There were several good reasons to propose such a move. The Mediterranean proposal favored by the British, initially a campaign in North Africa, was a great distance from the German industrial centers. Also,

a move against Italy would not likely yield a decisive result, even if Italy dropped out of the war. Concurrent with thoughts of Italy went the disadvantage of attacking Germany over the Alps. Finally, the U.S. and Britain would not be able to concentrate their full power in the Mediterranean. Only in England could the Allied military resources be effectively concentrated for a decisive operation against the Axis.¹¹

The British already had a plan for a cross-channel incursion, Operation Sledgehammer, which called for an emergency invasion if the situation on the Eastern front deteriorated to the point that the Russians were on the verge of collapse, or if the German position in Western Europe became weakened. The plan appealed to Marshall as a means of quickly implementing direct American involvement, and he directed Eisenhower and his planners to develop Bolero (a modification of Sledgehammer), a joint cross-channel offensive into France. As the summer of 1942 approached, however, there was still no agreement as to what the Allies would do or where they would do it.

Marshall and his planners at OPD knew conducting Sledgehammer in 1942 was not possible as neither ally could organize, train and equip a force of sufficient size with enough amphibious landing craft to conduct the operation.¹² In April of 1942 Marshall presented Operation Bolero to the British Chiefs of Staff for execution in the summer of 1943. The British Chiefs received Bolero enthusiastically, and the plan took concrete form under the code name Roundup.¹³

Prime Minister Churchill had other ideas, and strongly opposed Roundup because of his belief that the Germans were simply too strong in northwest Europe. In June of 1942 he succeeded in obtaining Roosevelt's agreement for Gymnast, an Allied operation to seize French North Africa as a base for further action elsewhere in the region.

Roosevelt favored Gymnast because it met his desire to find a suitable role for American combat forces as soon as possible, whereas the buildup time necessary to conduct Roundup in the summer of 1943 was simply too long to wait.¹⁴ Though the Combined Chiefs of Staff (CCS) could not concur upon a joint Allied strategy for the near term, Churchill and Roosevelt firmly agreed that a 1942 attack against the Axis was necessary. Thus planning for Operation Gymnast, which became Operation Torch, began in earnest and was the first of many compromises between the Allies. Now that the Americans had committed to action in the Mediterranean, it would be extremely difficult to not agree to further Mediterranean operations in the future.

Operation Torch had other advantages to the Americans besides Roosevelt's primary motivation. One of the most important involved preventing German occupation of French West Africa or French Morocco, which would appear to threaten the western hemisphere.¹⁵ The Atlantic Ocean is at its narrowest between the African west coast and Brazil, and German influence in Central and South America, already considerable, could grow and threaten America from the south. The British also viewed German occupation of Algeria or Tunisia as extremely dangerous because it would turn the Western Mediterranean into an Axis lake thereby creating another hole in the blockade of Germany. A successful Torch would also greatly increase the safety of Allied shipping in the Mediterranean and might even encourage Frenchmen to align themselves once more with the Allies. In the end, though Torch was a compromise operation for the Americans, it did have its advantages. For the British it was perfectly in line with their grand strategy from the beginning.

On 6 August 1942 now Lieutenant General Eisenhower was appointed as Commander-in-Chief, Allied Expeditionary Force (AEF), responsible to the CCS. This was appropriate mainly for two reasons: most of the troops for Operation Torch would be American, and it was believed that even if the French in Africa did not welcome an “American” invasion they would not seriously oppose it.¹⁶ Along those same lines of reasoning Eisenhower’s deputy, Major General Mark W. Clark, was specifically chosen to preserve the fiction of an almost exclusively American expedition, though the Allied Force Headquarters in London was composed of officers from the three services of both nations, and indeed the armies themselves were from both nations. In organizing his headquarters, Eisenhower integrated and balanced both British and American officers. That was the easy part. On the administrative side of things the two country’s systems differed so much that separate American and British sections were set up to work their own systems.

The CCS themselves represented a new institution in the evolution of warfare. Formed by the United Kingdom and the United States within a month after Pearl Harbor, it became the instrument of strategic discussion and decision for the Allies.¹⁷ Though the two nations opinions reflected their different geographical positions, unequal war potential, and divergent historical experiences, the professionalism of the group normally held sway and compromise became possible on a wide range of military issues for both nations.

Discussion of post-Torch operations began even before the invasion of North Africa in November 1942. Allied leaders initially believed the operation would culminate in only a few weeks. Churchill even mentioned Sicily and Italy as what he believed the

next steps should be in a September letter to Harry Hopkins, the former Secretary of Commerce who now acted as a personal assistant/advisor to Roosevelt.¹⁸

On 8 November 1942, the Allies launched Operation Torch along the beaches of North Africa (Morocco and Algeria). Torch was the first combat action on the road that eventually led the Allies to Sicily. By this time, the British were of the opinion the Allies should continue operations in the Mediterranean after the conclusion of Torch. Churchill believed the Allies should use bases in North Africa to strike at the Axis underbelly, and thought Sardinia or Sicily should be the next Allied targets, though he considered Sicily a far greater prize. Indeed, the British Joint Planners already had outline plans and codenames for operations in the major Italian islands; Brimstone for Sardinia, and Husky for Sicily.¹⁹

With the initial success of Torch, Roosevelt showed support for the British inclination toward further operations in the Mediterranean. Sardinia, Sicily, Italy, Greece and the Balkans were some of the possible locations discussed by Roosevelt and Churchill. Roosevelt's thoughts on Mediterranean operations did not coincide with those of his military advisors, who thought the British had changed direction on them from the agreed upon strategy. Many U.S. military leaders thought continued Mediterranean operations were logistically unfeasible and strategically unsound. Marshall still hoped for a cross-channel attack in 1943 and for turning away from what he considered the North African detour.

It eventually became clear that the North African campaign would take longer than a few weeks and that the next operation after Torch would not commence until the summer of 1943 at the earliest.²⁰ Furthermore, tough Axis resistance would require

additional Allied resources. This had the effect of taking resources away from any build-up for a cross-channel attack and Marshall began to believe Roundup might now have to wait until 1944. This new situation convinced the U.S. Joint Chiefs of the need for a well thought out guide for American mobilization and the allocation of men and material. In early December they proposed a strategy based on three elements: build-up in England for a cross-channel attack in 1943; a large air offensive against Germany from bases in England, North Africa, and the Middle East; and massive bombing of Italy to destroy Italian resources and morale and eliminate her from the war.²¹ The U.S. Joint Chiefs made no mention of further operations in the Mediterranean.

As the U.S. Chiefs were formulating their proposed strategy, Eisenhower and his staff at Allied Force Headquarters had also begun looking at post-Torch operations. In early December Eisenhower proposed Sardinia to the chiefs in Washington and London. The British chiefs were very supportive of the proposal, but the American chiefs gave it only lukewarm support.²² The American chiefs did believe, however, that an early Brimstone (Sardinia) would contribute as much to the Allied war effort than a later Husky (Sicily).

At this time British thinking centered on a peripheral strategy to defeat the Axis. They believed that invading Sardinia or Sicily would compel the Germans to disperse their forces, might knock Italy out of the war, and could possibly bring Turkey into the war on the Allied side. The dispersal of German forces would ease pressure on Russia and was an essential preliminary step to a cross-channel assault.²³ The American Chiefs of Staff, in contrast, believed the best course to be direct action against Germany in the form of a cross-channel invasion. They felt if no offensive action were possible in the

near future, then the U.S. should consider increasing allocations to the Pacific for more powerful thrusts against the Japanese. The Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Ernest J. King, believed if the Japanese had time to consolidate their conquests they would be infinitely more difficult to defeat.²⁴

Both the Americans and the British agreed that elimination of Italy from the war was a desirable goal. The real difference was their different opinions on the price to pay to reach this goal. The Americans thought the price should be comparatively small. They accepted the need to pressure Italy but thought air operations from North Africa would be enough, and rejected the idea of ground operations on the Italian mainland. The British had no problem with paying a higher price to knock Italy out of the war and saw it as a means of diminishing German strength. They pointed out that the Germans had shifted about eleven divisions to southern France in response to Torch. Thus, German defenses elsewhere to include the north coast of France and the Netherlands, had experienced a corresponding drawdown. An operation against Sardinia or Sicily would likely impel the Germans to move another four to six divisions to Italy, with possibly more divisions moving to the Balkans to counter any Allied threat there. This dispersing of German strength would facilitate Allied reentry to the Continent by way of northern France.²⁵

In December President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill decided it was time to gather once again to resolve what to do after the North African campaign. The British prepared extensively for the January conference in Casablanca. They took much time in advance to clearly think through what they would present to their American counterparts and had attempted to understand how the Americans would view their positions. For every position they intended to take they worked out calculations, plans,

and statistics to the last detail. Additionally, the British brought an elaborate staff with nearly every planning, cipher or technical capability conceivable in a 6,000 ton ship equipped as a headquarters and communications vessel.²⁶

On the American side, the chiefs did not make the same elaborate preparations as their British counterparts did, which became quickly apparent upon their arrival. Shortly before President Roosevelt departed for Casablanca he called the U.S. chiefs together to determine what recommendations they had. Marshall responded that the chiefs favored a cross-channel move more than the Mediterranean strategy preferred by the British, but that the question remained open in their minds. Marshall saw the issues primarily in logistical terms. Heavy shipping losses during a Sardinian or Sicilian operation might destroy the opportunity to close with the Axis on the Continent in the near future. Any Mediterranean operation, Marshall believed, would limit the resources destined for England and a cross-channel assault. If a Mediterranean operation had to be chosen Marshall preferred Sicily over Sardinia mainly because Sicily had more and better airfields. King preferred Sicily also because its possession offered better protection of the Mediterranean sea lines of communication.²⁷ Though it is questionable whether the extensive preparation by the British had a marked impact on the outcome of the conference it is certain the Americans felt underrepresented, and they quickly brought in several other senior officers to offer their support and judgment.²⁸

The Casablanca Conference

The Allies conducted the conference from 14 to 24 January 1943 in Casablanca, Morocco, intending to clarify direction on where the next Allied move would be after completion of a successful Operation Torch. The primary attendees were U.S. President

Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Churchill, and the CCS. As the conference began the Allied North African campaign was barely two months old and would continue until May. The British Eighth Army, after their victory at El Alamein the past July, was steadily pushing the vaunted Afrika Korps westward toward Tunisia, but the Afrika Korps was far from being finished. The Allied debacle at Kasserine Pass, which would do much to negatively color General Alexander's thoughts concerning the ability of American combat troops, was still a month away.

Possibly the greatest problem plaguing the Allies as Casablanca began was the availability of escort ships and landing craft to support a new Allied effort; it would be a primary deciding factor in planning any future Allied offensive. German U-boats had exacerbated the problem in the past year by sinking approximately one-million tons more shipping than the Allied ship building program had replaced, thus the ability of Allied shipping to move Allied forces was actually less at this time than it had been when the Americans first entered the war.²⁹ So urgent was the demand on British and American shipbuilding for other classes of ships that specialized landing craft for amphibious operations were not given a high priority for construction until mid-1942.³⁰ Fortunately for the Allies the American shipbuilding industry was now in high gear and, coupled with more aggressive tactics against the German U-boats, was beginning to turn the tide in this area.

Conspicuously absent from the conference was the Russian leader, Joseph Stalin, who saw no need to attend. When Stalin had met with Churchill in Moscow the past August, Churchill had proposed a December or January meeting between the Big Three allies. Stalin demurred because he believed without a firm commitment by the Americans

and British to open a second front there was no reason to meet.³¹ Opening a second front in the west would, of course, relieve some of the pressure on the Russians along the eastern front.

As the Allied leaders began arriving in Casablanca, the chiefs of staff from each ally met separately for one last time to finalize meeting strategies. The British chiefs in particular were anxious to meet with Field-Marshal Sir John Dill, the senior representative of the British Chiefs of Staff in Washington, D.C. Dill was extremely successful in dealing with the American Chiefs of Staff, was a close friend and confidant of General Marshall, and was so well respected by the Americans that they considered him as one of themselves. When the British Chiefs met with Dill, he warned them of the American aversion to further operations in the Mediterranean. Dill also pointed out what he believed was a division between the U.S. Army and Navy on the allocation of resources between theaters with the latter's primary concern on operations in the Pacific while the army thought more in terms of European operations.³² Since the navy technically controlled the allocation of landing craft for amphibious operations, their opinion must be accounted for in planning future operations.

As the American Chiefs of Staff met for the last time before the conference, President Roosevelt decided to attend the meeting. Marshall gave the President a brief summary of the British strategic concept in the European theater, which centered on their belief that Mediterranean operations offered the best chance of compelling Germany to disperse her critical air resources. He also stated the British chiefs now favored an attack against Sicily rather than Sardinia. Marshall reiterated the U.S. chiefs' position that any attack in the Mediterranean would slow preparations for Bolero, but the British were

extremely fearful of conducting direct action against the continent until a decided crack in German efficiency and morale had become apparent.³³

Conference business began in earnest as the CCS conducted their first and second meetings (the fifty-seventh and fifty-eighth CCS meetings of the war) on the afternoon of 15 January and the morning of 16 January. British General Sir Alan Brooke, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, outlined two broad policies the Allies could follow in the European Theater during 1943. The first was to close down Mediterranean operations following the conclusion of Torch and devote every effort to building up in England for a cross-channel invasion. The British had two main objections to this plan. The first involved the excellent railway connections across Europe that would allow the Germans to rapidly reinforce the invaded area. The second objection was that it would take most of the summer to build up sufficient forces for a concerted cross-channel effort, which meant no support would be forthcoming to Russia in regards to the establishment of a second front in the west until fall at the earliest.³⁴

The second potential broad policy, and the one the British favored, was to maintain activity in the Mediterranean, while conducting a maximum air offensive against Germany from Britain. Additionally, the Allies would build up as many troops as possible with an eye to conducting a comparatively small operation such as seizing the Cherbourg Peninsula in Northwest France. The British chiefs believed the Mediterranean offered many choices for a potential invasion, but Sicily appeared to be the biggest prize primarily because its capture lead to the potential of Italy dropping out of the war. This would of course force Germany to further disperse her forces in order to replace Italian troops no longer involved in the conflict. It also had the added benefit of allowing build

up of a larger force of heavy bombers in England in preparation for strategic attacks against German industrial targets.³⁵

The Americans did not necessarily disagree with what Brooke had laid out, but wanted to discuss the Mediterranean options more closely. Specifically, the U.S. chiefs wanted to know why the British appeared to be deviating from what the Americans believed was an agreement for a cross-channel invasion, the Bolero-Roundup plans, as soon as practical in 1943. Marshall laid out several concerns, the first of which addressed the east-west railway connections on the continent. In short, the U.S. chiefs did not dispute the British calculations on movement of German divisions, but believed the railways were subject to interdiction attacks from England. The second issue concerned the conduct of Mediterranean operations to create a “crack” in German strength. If such a crack developed the U.S. chiefs were not convinced that Allied shipping could move enough forces quickly enough to exploit the “crack.” Thirdly, any operation in the Mediterranean after Torch would affect the build-up of forces for Bolero-Roundup. Additionally, Eisenhower believed it unwise to count on landing craft used in the Mediterranean for a cross-channel invasion as the anticipated loss rate could be as high as seventy-five percent. Eisenhower also believed establishment of a bridgehead on the continent would require more divisions than currently planned for, thus a new operation in the Mediterranean would delay the cross-channel attack even further. Finally, the U.S. chiefs wondered whether an operation against Sicily was a means to an end or an end in itself. In the final analysis, the U.S. chiefs viewed further Mediterranean operations as a “suction pump” which would drain resources away from the main effort, but if further

Mediterranean operations were proposed then the CCS should be clear on what part such an operation would play in the overall Allied strategic plan for the upcoming year.³⁶

Brooke responded to the U.S. concerns by focusing on the current strength of German forces in France. With forty-four divisions in place, some of which had moved south as a result of Torch, the Germans still had sufficient strength to potentially overwhelm a cross-channel attack, which could not occur at any rate before late in the summer of 1943. To the British it made sense to conduct operations that forced the Germans to disperse their forces, and operations in the Mediterranean against Italy in particular would accomplish this and might also cause Italy to drop out of the war altogether. If that were to happen, Germany would have to occupy Italy with a considerable force and would also have to replace Italian troops in the Balkans and Greece. Brooke acknowledged that at the same time operations were ongoing in Sicily the Allies should continue the build-up in England for a cross-channel invasion.³⁷ Marshal of the Royal Air Force, Sir Charles Portal, believed it impossible to map out a detailed plan for defeating Germany, but knocking Italy out of the war would undoubtedly jeopardize Germany's position. Finally, Brooke expressed the view that the Allies should plan on reentering the Continent in 1944 on a large scale. Thus we see the basic Allied plan beginning to take shape as it actually happened--Sicily in 1943 and the cross-channel invasion in 1944.

At a meeting between the U.S. Joint Chiefs and the President later in the day, King and Marshall informed the President that the British would be willing to seize the opportunity to invade the Continent if operations in the Mediterranean and by the Russians on the eastern front caused the Germans to withdraw forces from France. They

added that the U.S. chiefs had come to the conclusion that the Allies should undertake Operation Husky, but had not told the British Chiefs so as of yet.³⁸ The primary reasons included the large number of troops that would be available upon the conclusion of Torch; the economy of tonnage resultant from the capture of Sicily, that is, 225 ships freed up from Mediterranean security operations for use in other places such as Burma, the Middle East, and the Pacific; and the possibility of eliminating Italy from the war which would force the Germans to take over Italy's current commitments.³⁹

The wrangling over Allied strategic direction for 1943 had come to a conclusion and at the second plenary meeting between Roosevelt, Churchill, and the CCS on 18 January, Brooke summarized the content of the Allies' first general strategic policy document. Its main elements included top priority for combating the U-boat menace in the Atlantic and a statement to the effect that the Allies would concentrate first on the defeat of Germany, then Japan. Additionally, it identified the capture of Sicily as the next Allied target, with continued build up of forces in England for a cross-channel thrust should German strength in France decrease due to the withdrawal of her troops for other operations or an internal collapse.⁴⁰

Now that the Allies had decided on Sicily as the next Allied undertaking, the primary concern became how to plan and conduct Operation Husky, especially in light of the fact that the end of Operation Torch was not yet clearly in sight. Discussions during the rest of the Casablanca Conference would center on identifying a chain of command for Husky, settling on a date for the operation, pinpointing strategic guidance and an outline plan for the Allied commander, discussion of possible deception plans, and training concerns.

Initial review of basic Husky requirements by the British planning staff lead the British chiefs to believe that mid-August would be the first date British forces would be ready to conduct the operation. Though the Americans did not have a planning staff at their disposal at Casablanca, Marshall believed U.S. forces could be ready by 1 August or earlier. These August dates were dependent on Torch concluding sometime in April and on access to acceptable training areas for both U.S. and British forces. After thoroughly discussing the possibilities the CCS settled on the favorable July moon period as the target date to execute Husky.⁴¹

At the final (third) plenary meeting of the conference, Churchill sought to bring the date forward to June as both he and Roosevelt were not comfortable with the thought of four months passing by after the conclusion of Torch with no Allied troops fighting Germans.⁴² Marshall pointed out that training was a very important consideration in the CCS recommendation for a July Husky and used examples from the Torch landings to support his point, but the primary consideration was naval, since it would take considerable time to assemble the requisite landing craft for the invasion and to organize and train their crews. Marshall's point that a July Husky was not so much dependent on concluding Torch in April as it was on logistics and training issues satisfied Churchill, but Roosevelt continued to press the issue. He was also concerned a July Husky might leave the Allies unprepared to take advantage of a potential Italian collapse, which recent intelligence reports had considered a possibility. Such an event might make it necessary for Husky preparations to be far enough along that the Allies could quickly act not only in Sicily, but perhaps Sardinia or even Italy itself. After some further discussion the conferees agreed the July date would stand with the understanding that the final

instruction would direct Eisenhower to make an intense effort in the next three weeks to try and achieve the favorable June moon as the Husky launch date. However, if at the end of three weeks it was clear that a June Husky was not possible the July date would stand.⁴³

The final CCS Operation Husky directive appointed General Eisenhower as Supreme Commander (see appendix B). It also appointed General Alexander as Deputy Commander-in-Chief and assigned him the responsibility to plan, prepare and execute the actual operation. Admiral of the Fleet Sir Andrew Cunningham was designated the Naval Commander, and Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder was named the Air Commander. The CCS identified a target date to coincide with the favorable July moon, but stipulated that Eisenhower should ensure a concerted planning and preparation effort in early February, with an eye toward executing the operation during the favorable June moon if possible. Also, by 1 March, Eisenhower was to report any insurmountable obstacle that might cause the delay of Husky past the July moon with August identified as the latest acceptable date for the operation. The directive charged Eisenhower to immediately set up a special operational and administrative staff, with its own chief of staff, to plan and prepare the operation along with the cover plans, and provided a copy of the Husky outline plan prepared by the British Joint Planning Staff.⁴⁴ With the CCS directive and the outline plan, Eisenhower and Alexander now had the guidance and authority they needed to set up the Husky planning staff and begin planning operations.

¹Gerhard Weinberg, *World in the Balance* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1981), 66.

²*Ibid.*, 57-58.

³Ibid., 59.

⁴Ibid., 69-71.

⁵Carlo D'Este, *Bitter Victory* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1988), 31.

⁶Walter Warlimont, *Inside Hitler's Headquarters* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1964), 203.

⁷Ibid., 307-308.

⁸Felix Gilbert, *Hitler Directs His War* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1951), 31.

⁹Warlimont, *Inside Hitler's Headquarters*, 317-318.

¹⁰D'Este, *Bitter Victory*, 32.

¹¹Albert N. Garland, Howard M. Smyth, and Martin Blumenson, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1965), 3.

¹²D'Este, *Bitter Victory*, 33.

¹³Garland, Smyth, and Blumenson, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 3.

¹⁴D'Este, *Bitter Victory*, 34.

¹⁵I. S. O. Playfair et al., *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, vol. 4 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1966), 109.

¹⁶Ibid., 112.

¹⁷Garland, Smyth, and Blumenson, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 2.

¹⁸Ibid., 4.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid., 5.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid., 6.

²³Playfair et al., *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, vol. 4, 262.

²⁴Garland, Smyth, and Blumenson, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 6.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Arthur Byant, *The Turn of the Tide*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1957), 439.

²⁷Garland, Smyth, and Blumenson, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 7.

²⁸Jacob Smart, "The Casablanca Conference, January 1943," *Air Power History* 46, no. 3 (fall 1999): 36-43.

²⁹Byant, *The Turn of the Tide*, 440.

³⁰Playfair et al., *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, vol. 4, 119.

³¹D'Este, *Bitter Victory*, 35.

³²Ibid., 37-38.

³³Robert E. Lester, Project Coordinator, *Map Room Files of President Roosevelt, 1939-1945*, (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1991), microfilm, 2:37.

³⁴Ibid., 1:794.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid., 1:806.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid., 2:43.

³⁹Ibid., 1:741.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid., 1:889.

⁴²Playfair et al., *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, vol. 4, 264.

⁴³Lester, *Map Room Files of President Roosevelt*, 1:753.

⁴⁴Paul Kesaris, ed., *Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; Part 1: 1942-1945; The European Theater* (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1981), microfilm, 4:20.

CHAPTER 3

THE PLANNING OF OPERATION HUSKY

Eisenhower and Alexander set up the Husky planning staff in late January at Algiers. The staff was colloquially known as Force 141--from the number of the room in the St. George's Hotel where the staff first met--and consisted of both American and British officers. Major General Clarence R. Huebner, later to become the commander of the 1st Infantry Division, became deputy chief of staff. This proved to be a difficult position for Huebner because at that time Alexander had a rather low opinion of the combat effectiveness of American troops, which was made worse by the debacle at Kasserine Pass, and would still exist at the conclusion of operations in North Africa. Huebner apparently resented Alexander's attitude and felt himself saddled with the task of protecting American interests, which did not promote a harmonious environment at Force 141. It would not be until Brigadier General Lyman L. Lemnitzer,¹ replaced Huebner in July 1943 that American relations with Alexander would begin to show marked improvement.²

After setting up the Force 141 staff, on 11 February Eisenhower next turned to appointing his task force commanders for Husky. There would be two task forces for Sicily: one in the east composed of British forces and one in the west composed of Americans. In the east he appointed Montgomery as the land component commander, Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay as the maritime component commander, and Air Vice-Marshall Harry Broadhurst as the air component commander. In the west he appointed Lieutenant General George S. Patton and the land component commander, Vice Admiral

H. Kent Hewitt as the maritime component commander, and Colonel L. P. Hickey as the air component commander.³ The CCS concurred with these appointments on 13 February. Unfortunately, most of these able officers, especially Montgomery and Patton, and Eisenhower and Alexander as well, were deeply involved in Torch and would remain so until Axis resistance ceased on 13 May. This left precious little time to attend to details regarding the Husky plan and led to a somewhat bewildering story of the planning effort between February and May. Because many of the important decision makers were still involved in Operation Torch and could not be brought together in one place to facilitate Husky planning, there would be some aspects of Husky that would not be properly coordinated even as the operation began.

In addition to Force 141 there would be other planning organizations for Husky: the Eastern Task Force headquarters (Montgomery's planning staff), designated as Force 545, located in Cairo, Egypt; and the Western Task Force headquarters (Patton's planning staff), designated Force 343, located in Rabat, Morocco. Since some Husky troops would stage directly from Britain and the U.S., London and Washington also became centers of planning. With five separate planning centers there was bound to be some confusion. Complicating the planning organization even further, Alexander, Cunningham, and Tedder all decided to establish their operational headquarters in still other locations.⁴

Another problem encountered by Eisenhower was the difference in standard practices for command between the Americans and British. In the American system the overall commander exercised complete authority over conduct of the operation. He alone held final decision-making authority over the operation as a whole. If the overall commander decided to appoint subordinate task force commanders in addition to his

standing deputies, he had the authority to do so and the task force commanders would report directly to him if he so desired. The British system of the day used a decision by committee mindset. This mindset tended to promote independent actions of the services with somewhat limited coordination between them and would later hinder the Allies' ability to stop the Axis evacuation. Eisenhower was concerned that this mindset might hinder his ability to appoint task force commanders and he told Marshall just that.⁵ While Eisenhower did not expect problems or any action on Marshall's part, he (Eisenhower) wanted to make sure Marshall was aware of the issue. Another difference which would clearly come out later during the actual operation (an incident between Patton and Alexander) was that when a British commander gave an order, the British tradition was to permit challenge of the order without considering the challenger insubordinate.⁶ The American view was that when the commander gave an order, though not completely prohibiting discussion, the tradition was that order would be carried out without question.

Planning got off to a rocky start as Alexander's Force 141 was mostly composed of personnel brought in from outside the theater with precious little experience planning joint operations on the scale of Husky. The fact that Alexander, Eisenhower, Patton, and Montgomery were all deeply involved in Torch meant Force 141 was not getting the type of guidance it needed to ensure planning proceeded smoothly. Lacking further guidance Force 141 took the original outline plan, which came through the CCS at Casablanca, and only slightly modified its two basic courses of action--separate assaults at the ports of Palermo in the west and Catania in the southeast--and one variation--a dual operation against both ports.⁷ These courses of action obviously left open the possibility that Axis forces could reinforce or evacuate using the Messina Strait.

Early in the planning Force 141 actually considered a scheme to drop the airborne divisions in the toe of Italy to prevent reinforcements and supplies from reaching Axis forces on Sicily, and would have effectively sealed off hope for Axis escape. However, by April, Eisenhower and Alexander had decided the vital role for the airborne forces was to soften the beach defenses during the assault phase. This reasoning was mainly a result of a lack of transports to drop more than three brigades of airborne troops in one lift. Because the landings were to be simultaneous, the reuse of the same air transports to bring more airborne forces to Sicily would take too long and the idea was scrapped.⁸ After the war, Field Marshal Kesselring and his chief of staff would both express their bewilderment at the lack of Allied vision.⁹

The Force 141 planners knew gaining possession of the major Sicilian ports was essential to Husky as resupply of a large force across beaches was still an untried technique at this stage of the war. With little practical experience to show otherwise, the planners doubted whether resupply across beaches would work, especially while under air attack, even though the virtually unopposed Torch landings had used beach resupply for the early parts of that assault. Thus, the planners considered capture of the major ports (capacity of 1,000 tons per day or greater) of Palermo, Catania, and Syracuse, and the smaller ports of Augusta and Licata essential to the operation. Direct assault against Augusta, Syracuse, and Palermo was seen as impractical because of known coast defenses in those locations, but a direct assault against Catania was possible if some batteries were neutralized.¹⁰ With these thoughts in mind the Force 141 group proceeded with their original Husky plan of separate operations in the southeast and west. In short, the plan called for three British divisions to land on D day at widely separated points in

the southeast, and one American division at a point (near Sciacca) some sixty miles west of the nearest British division. Then, on D+2 the rest of the American force would land in the northwest part of the island, and finally, on D+3, the rest of the British forces would land near Catania. Force 141 sent a copy of this plan to Patton's Force 343 planning staff and Montgomery's Force 545 planning staff as Patton and Montgomery were responsible to plan their own assaults in detail.¹¹

By the middle of February it became clear to Eisenhower that a June Husky would not be possible, but the CCS rejected this notion and directed Eisenhower to continue planning toward the June date and report to them by 10 April (on the state of preparations). Eisenhower's major concerns centered on the arrival of sufficient landing craft, and as experience with the Torch landings demonstrated, the high degree of combined training his forces would need (in preparation to face the tough opposition expected in Husky).¹² It was not unreasonable to expect tough resistance. From the Germans this was a given, but even the Italians had fought hard along the Enfidaville Line in Tunisia, and in other locations where they had good defensive positions.¹³ As Sicily was home for Italian forces, the Allied planners naturally expected them to fight even harder. Though it may be arguable that signs of collapsing Italian resistance were visible, most Allied planners and their senior leadership did not comprehend them sufficiently to seriously consider the risk of landings on both sides of the Messina Strait.

By 20 March, Montgomery had reviewed the Husky plan (landings by Eighth Army in the southeast and Seventh Army in the west), and reached the conclusion that the Eighth Army landings would leave them spread too thinly along the southeastern beaches from Gela (in the south) eastward to the Pachino peninsula (which marked the

southeast corner of the island) then north nearly to Catania, a distance of over 100 miles. He convinced Alexander and Eisenhower that to accomplish the objectives assigned to Eighth Army he needed an additional division. Since shipping to move another division was not available (in reserve),¹⁴ Montgomery proposed transfer to Eighth Army of one of Patton's divisions to make the assault at Gela to capture the nearby airfields at the western-most end of the Eighth Army line, thereby freeing up a British division to augment the forces assaulting closer to Catania. Eisenhower and Alexander accepted this idea, but understood that the absence of this division from Patton's assault on Palermo would increase the difficulty of Seventh Army's mission. It was difficult decision, but in the eyes of Eisenhower and Alexander capture of the airfields near Catania (Gerbini) and Gela (Comiso, Ponte Olivo, and Biscari) were crucial to the success of Husky, and they would thus accept the risk of one less division for Patton's assault force. The British eventually found an additional division as well as the necessary shipping to augment Montgomery and on 6 April Alexander returned Patton's division to its original task of assaulting near the village of Sciacca in southwestern Sicily in order to secure airfields in support of Patton's main assault at Palermo.¹⁵

As Montgomery continued evaluating the latest plan, he decided to send his own chief of staff, Major General Francis de Guingand, to Cairo to take over at Force 545 as both his chief of staff and deputy. De Guingand studied the plan at length and came to the conclusion that a much greater concentration of landing forces was necessary if the Allies were to overcome the expected tough resistance at the landing sites. Montgomery's wish then became a much more restricted landing area for the Eighth Army in the Gulf of Noto (south of Syracuse) and on both sides of the Pachino peninsula. Cunningham and Tedder

rejected Montgomery's new plan as it did not address the capture of the important airfields near Gela, west of the newly proposed assault areas, from where the Axis could launch devastating air attacks against assault force shipping and the assault force itself on the beaches. Alexander called a conference on 29 April in Algiers to address the issues. Montgomery could not attend, but sent de Guingand in his place. Unfortunately, while on the way to Algiers, de Guingand was injured in an aircraft accident. Montgomery called in Lieutenant General Oliver Leese, commander of the British 30th Corps, to present his arguments in de Guingand's place. Leese superbly represented Montgomery's views and then introduced a new concept: he proposed scrapping the current two-pronged attack plan in favor of a concentrated assault by both British and American forces on southeastern Sicily. Cunningham and Tedder rejected Leese's idea as it would leave the key airbases in western Sicily in Axis hands thus greatly endangering Allied naval support. A deadlock now ensued which Eisenhower finally broke in another conference on 2 May in Algiers. Montgomery attended this conference in person to present his views and on 3 May Eisenhower accepted a modified version of Montgomery's proposal that called for Patton's Seventh Army to shift its landings to the southeast corner of Sicily along the Gulf of Gela from Licata eastward toward the Pachino peninsula. The British would land from the Pachino peninsula northward nearly to Syracuse (see appendix C).¹⁶

This new configuration was the one in which the Allies would make the actual assault, though discussions would continue on the relative merits of the old plan versus the new plan, that is, dispersed landings and capture of better port facilities and more airfields, versus more powerful and concentrated landings. Though the new plan would leave, at least temporarily, certain airfields in Axis hands the risk was deemed acceptable.

The Axis airfields on Sicily were in three main groups: Gerbini in the east; Comiso and Ponte Olivo in the southeast; and Castelvetro, Milo, and Palermo in the west. All were within about fifteen miles of the coast. The airfields in the east and southeast were fairly close together and thus mutually supporting. However, because of the relatively short range of Axis fighter aircraft, the airfields in the west could not provide effective fighter cover for the airfields in the east and southeast, and vice versa. This was a major consideration in the acceptability of scrapping the Palermo landings by Seventh Army, though theoretically Allied planners still expected the Axis to be able to launch over 700 aircraft against the Allies on the first day of the invasion.¹⁷

Also not to be forgotten was the Italian surface fleet. Allied planners believed the Italians had six battleships, seven cruisers, and some thirty destroyers. Additionally the Italians had forty-eight submarines and the Germans had twenty in the area, and in Sicilian coastal waters E-boats would be a danger. Even with these numbers Admiral Cunningham expected Allied command of the sea to be overwhelming, but he remained ready to counter Axis fleet concentration in either the Eastern or Western basins of the Mediterranean. His greatest concern was still the Axis airfields in eastern and southeastern Sicily and the danger they posed to his fleet.¹⁸

If the planning aspect of Husky appeared jumbled and confusing, it is because it actually was. After Eisenhower and Alexander approved Montgomery's new Husky outline plan, Major General Charles Gairdner, the Chief of Staff at Force 141, held that Force 141 had been severely discredited and believed it would be best for the common cause if he resigned his current position.¹⁹ This is understandable, as the nearly final Husky plan had really taken shape in the last few days of April and the first few days of

May therefore rendering the previous three months activity somewhat fruitless. More than anything else this is attributable to the absence of direct senior ground commander (Alexander, Patton, Montgomery) involvement from the planning operations going on at Force 141, Force 343, and Force 545, due to events in North Africa. Indeed, the senior commanders were only spasmodically available to attend to Operation Husky details.

In spite of all the difficulties in settling on the final configuration of the Husky landings, after Eisenhower's 3 May decision the work of preparing the invasion found a new sense of direction. The CCS had finally approved the July date vice the June date, which left the planning staffs the time they needed to make final preparations. The five stages of the final plan were: (1) preparatory naval and air operations to neutralize enemy activities at sea and to gain air supremacy; (2) seaborne and airborne assaults against certain airfields and the ports of Syracuse and Licata; (3) establishment of a firm base from which to conduct operations against the ports of Augusta and Catania, and the group of airfields at Gerbini; (4) the capture of these ports and airfields; and (5) the reduction of the island.²⁰ Notice that Messina was not mentioned in these five stages, though all involved apparently understood it was the ultimate objective in the fifth stage of the plan. The first four stages were fairly clear, but the way in which the fifth stage would be accomplished was not spelled out. During the actual operation this deficiency would have a telling impact on the operational conduct of the campaign.

¹Lemnitzer would later become a NATO Supreme Allied Commander and U.S. Army Chief of Staff.

²Albert N. Garland, Howard M. Smyth, and Martin Blumenson, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1965), 56.

³C. J. C. Molony et al., *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, vol. 5 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1973), 4.

⁴Carlo D'Este, *Bitter Victory* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1988), 73.

⁵Robert E. Lester, ed., *The Papers of George C. Marshall* (Bethesda, MD; University Publications of America, 1992), microfilm, 14:897.

⁶D'Este, *Bitter Victory*, 331.

⁷*Ibid.*, 76.

⁸Molony et al., *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, vol. 5, 28.

⁹D'Este, *Bitter Victory*, 76.

¹⁰Molony et al., *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, vol. 5, 15.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 18.

¹²Alfred D. Chandler Jr. et al., eds., *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower, The War Years: II* (Baltimore, MD; The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), 959-961.

¹³Harry C. Butcher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower* (New York; Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1946), 318.

¹⁴Garland, Smyth, and Blumenson, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 60.

¹⁵Chandler et al., *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, 1,045-1,048.

¹⁶Garland, Smyth, and Blumenson, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 61-63.

¹⁷Molony et al., *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, vol. 5, 14.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 24.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 29.

CHAPTER 4

THE INVASION OF SICILY

The total Allied victory achieved in North Africa in mid-May 1943 increased morale substantially throughout the Allied armies to the point where they may have begun to believe they were superior to German troops--an impression not necessarily grounded in fact, but important for the self confidence of Allied forces nevertheless. Additionally, the loss of North Africa had a telling effect on the Italian people and the Italian command, which greatly concerned the Germans over the state of relations between the two Axis powers. This blow to Italy's colonial aspirations opened the Italians' eyes to the danger of a threat to Italy herself, which to this point had experienced little damage in the war.¹

The psyche of the Italian people by this time of the war yields an important clue to the lack of fighting spirit exhibited by their soldiers during the battle for Sicily despite their hard fighting against the British along the Enfidaville line in Tunisia. In short, their involvement in one campaign or another since the 1936 invasion of Ethiopia had tired the Italians of war. The Italian dictator, Benito Mussolini, wished to bring back the glory days of the old Roman empire and he never tired of telling the Italian people of his desire to turn them into a great power inspiring fear and admiration. Privately, though, Mussolini boasted of being the Duce of Fascism first and the leader of Italy second.² For the most part, Italians, including Italian soldiers, saw through the sham Mussolini had brought them and badly wanted out of the war.

By this time the Germans did not have a great amount of faith in the fighting spirit of their Italian allies and this led Field Marshal Kesselring to distribute the two German divisions initially available to him throughout the island both as a counterattack force and in position to disarm the Italians should they defect.³ Kesselring's concept of repelling the invasion was that the battle would be fought at the coastline by the Italian coastal units supported by local reserves under division and corps control. Mobile reserves, the four Italian mobile divisions, relatively close to the coast, were to attack as soon as the Allies came ashore. Finally, the German divisions would roll in and clean up any remaining Allied pockets of resistance. If successful, this Axis concept of defense would prevent the Allies from establishing a continuous front.⁴

As Axis forces completed final preparations for the Allied invasion there was much discussion at Allied headquarters concerning the best time to initiate the assault. Serious concerns dealt especially with the phase of the moon as the invasion commenced. Current doctrine favored beach landings during darkness, yet the success of the airborne operations depended on moonlight so the troop-carrying aircraft could find the proper drop zones. General Eisenhower eventually settled on an invasion date, 10 July 1943, which corresponded with the second quarter moon and would provide both the necessary light *and* darkness to conduct the operation. The invasion would begin around midnight with the airborne assaults designed to disrupt the enemy rear and thereby assist the amphibious elements ashore a few hours later.⁵

Eisenhower believed there would be rather high losses at some of the landing sites, but on the whole believed the plan would be successful as long as supplies were timely. This was especially a concern in the American landing zone because there were

no large capacity ports there and most supplies would have to come across the beaches. Eisenhower knew a chief advantage of the plan was the depth of attacking forces, but he was also concerned that concentrating the landings on the south and east sides of the island bunched our forces such that Axis aircraft and submarines would have would have an abundance of easy targets.⁶

The final Husky assault plan had more than seven divisions, including three British, three U.S., and one Canadian, coming ashore simultaneously along a front of 100 miles (see appendix C). The areas covered by the assault and the assault forces themselves would be larger than those of the Normandy invasion nearly a year later. In fact, the Sicily assault would be the largest and most dispersed amphibious assault of World War II. General Alexander had no specific plan to develop the land campaign from the initial beachhead, but instead preferred to get the two armies firmly ashore before launching out. He counted on Montgomery's Eighth Army to make the main effort of driving north along the east coast quickly through Catania and up to the Strait of Messina. Patton's Seventh Army would protect Montgomery's flank.⁷

Eighth Army would make five simultaneous predawn landings, at approximately 2:45 A.M., with the British 13th Corps (Lieutenant General Miles Dempsey) on the right from the east coast village of Noto northward to within a few miles of Syracuse. The British 30th Corps (Lieutenant General Oliver Leese) would land on the southeast corner of the island to seize the airfield at Pachino and link up with the 13th Corps near Noto and the U.S. Seventh Army's 2d Corps (Lieutenant General Omar Bradley) in the west along a line running southward from Ragusa. At just past midnight, approximately 2½ hours before the beach landings, elements of the British 1st Airlanding Brigade would

conduct a glider assault just southwest of Syracuse on the 13th Corps northern flank with the objective to seize the Ponte Grande (the bridge crossing the Anapo River) on highway 115, and the western part of Syracuse itself. Then, elements of the 13th Corps (the British 5th Division along with commando units landing nearby) would complete the seizure of the port of Syracuse. With a beachhead and Syracuse secured, the 13th Corps was to advance north toward Augusta and Catania.⁸

Patton's Seventh Army would land simultaneously with Eighth Army on a seventy mile front extending just west of Licata, east through Gela, and continuing on to Pozzallo. Elements of the 82d Airborne Division (the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment) would begin the assault just after midnight by airdropping a few miles east of Gela to secure key high ground in the Piano Lupo area, which commanded a road junction strong point consisting of sixteen pillboxes and blockhouses controlling access to Gela from the east. Patton's invasion force would seize the small Gela and Licata ports and the nearby airfields of Licata, Ponte Olivo, Biscari, and Comiso, in addition to linking up with the Eighth Army's 30th Corps near Pozzallo. Patton was then to be ready for future operations as directed by Alexander.⁹

As Patton analyzed the terrain in his area of operations (AO) he saw that the high ground near Piazza Armerina, about twenty miles north of Gela, overlooked the assault beaches. This terrain also carried the main road from Enna and Caltanissetta to Gela and Syracuse. Patton believed the Axis would use this road to shift forces from the western and central portions of the island to oppose the Allied landings and this high ground thus became the key objective for Seventh Army. Also important on Patton's west flank

would be possession of a secondary ridge east of the Salso River, which flowed through Licata.¹⁰

By sunset on 12 July, Bradley's 2d Corps was to seize the airfields in their AO and advance to Phase Line Yellow, the first of Patton's two phase lines marking the beachhead area, which for 2d Corps ran from Mazzarino eastward through Caltagirone on to Vizzini. Simultaneously, the reinforced 3d Infantry Division (Major General Lucian K. Truscott) would seize Licata and its airfield and advance to Phase Line Yellow running from Mazzarino westward through Campobello to Palma di Montechiaro. Once these objectives were secure Seventh Army would advance to Phase Line Blue, which would expand the beachhead and secure Patton's main objective, the high ground near Piazza Armerina (see appendix C).¹¹

On 5 July the Allied invasion fleet began moving as the 1st Canadian Division (Eighth Army, 30th Corps) sailed from the U.K. bound for Sicily, and over the next few days the rest of the assault force sailed from various other ports in the Mediterranean and Middle East for rendezvous points near Malta. Remarkably, there was little Axis interference with the convoys, but U-boats did sink three ships carrying elements of the 1st Canadian Division from the U.K. Few men died in the sinkings, but much of the headquarters' signal equipment and about 500 vehicles were lost, which would later hamper the Eighth Army's northward push along the Sicilian east coast towards Messina.¹²

The Mediterranean had been calm, but on the morning of 9 July the wind and sea began to rise and by afternoon the wind had reached a speed of nearly forty miles per hour. The bad weather caused many of the landing craft to straggle behind the main fleet

and the result was that many of the convoys were up to an hour late in arriving at their assigned areas off the Sicilian coast, and many vessels were not in the right locations.¹³ The possibility arose of postponing the operation by twenty-four hours, but after conferring with Admiral Cunningham's meteorologists, Eisenhower decided against postponement and the invasion remained on as scheduled. Eisenhower cabled General Marshall that the invasion would take place as planned and returned to Cunningham's underground headquarters to await initial reports from Sicily.¹⁴ The meteorologists were right, and about midnight the wind began to ease somewhat, but was still strong enough to slow the transports carrying the American and British airborne troops already on their way to Sicily.¹⁵ Fortunately, by 2:45 A.M., as the main invasion began, the wind was slight.

Meanwhile, as the Allied convoys approached Sicily, the Italian Commander, General Guzzoni, began receiving reports from Luftwaffe headquarters on the approaching invasion fleet. Though it still was not certain where the Allies would invade, Guzzoni was convinced the Allies were headed for the southeast corner of the island. At about 7:00 P.M. Guzzoni ordered a preliminary alert, followed three hours later by a full alert. By nightfall the waters off Sicily seemed deserted, but despite the windy weather and rough seas the German and Italian defenders knew there was an approaching invasion fleet, filled with American and British soldiers, heading for Sicily. They waited for the Allied air bombardments and naval gunfire they believed would signal the start of the invasion.¹⁶

At just past 6:30 P.M. on 9 July the 51st Troop Carrier Wing sent 109 American C-47s and thirty-five British Albermarles into the sky each towing a Waco or Horsa

glider and headed for the Eighth Army's airborne assault areas just south of Syracuse. Two hours later the 52d Troop Carrier Wing sent 222 C-47s loaded with paratroopers from the American 504th and 505th Parachute Infantry Regiments towards the Seventh Army airborne assault areas near Piano Lupo (east of Gela). Despite navigational trouble caused by the high winds aloft, ninety percent of the aircraft made landfall at Cape Passero, the checkpoint at the southeast tip of Sicily. Lack of night flying experience and insufficient practice in flying the unfamiliar new formations now began to take its toll among the transport pilots and confusion set in. Of the approximately 115 gliders believed to have been released, only fifty-four managed landings on Sicily, with only twelve of those on or near the correct landing zones. The rest dropped into the sea. The result was that a small band of less than 100 British airborne troops were moving toward their first objective, the Ponte Grande south of Syracuse, at about the time the Eighth Army was beginning to land on the beaches.¹⁷

The American paratroopers hardly fared better. A combination of the high winds, unfamiliar flying formations, and little night flying practice ensured the break up of the air columns. As the planes approached what they believed were their drop zones, antiaircraft fire from Gela, Ponte Olivo, and Niscemi compounded their orientation problems. The result was that 3,400 paratroopers jumped and found themselves widely scattered across southeastern Sicily, less than 200 of them near the objective, the important high ground of Piano Lupo. This didn't mean they were not effective, though, as small bands of paratroopers roamed through the rear areas of the Italian coastal defense units, cutting enemy communications lines, ambushing small patrols, and

creating much confusion among Axis commanders as to where the main airborne landing had taken place.¹⁸

Though the winds had died down considerably since midnight the seas were still quite rough, and this hampered some of the beach landings. On the Allied right (just south of Syracuse) the British Eighth Army (13th Corps) experienced navigation difficulties and some late landings, a few as much as an hour late, but overall, Dempsey's troops were successful and took Syracuse on D day. Italian resistance during the landings was sporadic, and as a rule most Italian defensive positions fired a few bursts at Allied landing craft and troops, and then made off. Allied naval gunfire silenced what few Italian shore guns went into action. Meanwhile, the 30th Corps landings went somewhat smoother with resistance described as light or negligible, and by the end of the day Leese's corps had its initial objectives firmly in hand.¹⁹

At the west end of the Allied assault line, the U.S. 3d Infantry Division landed on both sides of Licata. Heavy seas had made the landing operation difficult, but despite some units landing as much as an hour late, General Truscott's men successfully moved forward against some fairly stiff resistance by the Italian 207th Coastal Division, probably the most significant resistance faced during the Allied landings. To the east of the 3d Infantry Division, General Bradley's 2d Corps landed from Gela eastward past Scoglitti. The 1st Infantry Division landed at Gela and, despite some sporadic tough fighting, cleared the city of resistance by 8:00 A.M., captured 200 Italian prisoners, and formed a strong defensive line facing inland. The 45th Infantry Division landed on either side of Scoglitti, and despite being spread out significantly more than planned were able to begin pushing inland against only light Italian resistance.²⁰

At about the time the Allied beach landings commenced, General Guzzoni received word of the Allied glider assault near Syracuse and that fighting had started near the Syracuse seaplane base. He ordered reinforcements to the area, but as German reconnaissance planes reported Allied fleets close to the south coast, Guzzoni realized the Allies would likely conduct simultaneous landings across a wide front. He knew his forces could not concurrently counter all the landings, so he committed his available reserve to the areas he considered most essential to the overall defense of the island, Syracuse, Gela, and Licata, with Syracuse the most critical. Guzzoni reasoned that with a German task force (Group Schmalz) and the Napoli Division in the Syracuse area, plus the defenses of the seaplane base itself, there were sufficient forces to stabilize that area and prevent an Allied breakthrough to the Catania plain. With that in mind, Guzzoni ordered the bulk of the Hermann Goering Division to counterattack the Allied landing areas near Gela. Also, Guzzoni directed the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division to begin immediate movement from their positions in western Sicily to the center of the island near the Canicatti-Caltanissetta area.²¹

Guzzoni intended to launch a coordinated counterattack against the 1st Infantry Division at Gela, the Hermann Goering Division and two Italian mobile groups to strike from the northeast, and the Livorno Division from the northwest. Unfortunately, the American paratroopers had succeeded in cutting most of the Axis communications in the area and many units did not receive the counterattack order, including the Hermann Goering Division commander, General Paul Conrath. Even with communications severely lacking, Conrath knew the Allies had landed and had decided on his own to counterattack toward Gela. The Axis forces attacked, but it was not the coordinated

attack Guzzoni envisioned, and all eventually failed to seriously threaten the American beachhead. By nightfall of D day, 10 July, the Seventh Army had a firm toehold on Sicily, and only in the center where the uncoordinated Axis counterattacks occurred was there any immediate concern.²²

As the British 13th Corps advanced northward past Syracuse the Napoli Division counterattacked them near Solarino, a small village less than ten miles west of Syracuse. Unfortunately for the Axis, the Napoli Division and Group Schmalz, who were supposed to conduct a coordinated counterattack, were unable to establish communications, thus the British were able to defeat the Napoli Division counterattack before they met and were temporarily stopped by Group Schmalz at Priolo (a little more than five miles northwest of Syracuse).²³

D day, 10 July, was generally an Allied success despite the problems caused by the weather, the lack of experienced airmen, and beach landing errors. At about 8:00 P.M., Guzzoni, though greatly disappointed at the failure of the counterattacks against Gela, began issuing attack orders for the next morning. He ordered the Napoli Division and Group Schmalz to make a determined effort to knock out the Eighth Army beachhead south of Syracuse, and directed the Hermann Goering Division and the Livorno Division to launch coordinated counterattacks against Gela. This time, the commanders of the Hermann Goering and Livorno Divisions were both present with Guzzoni as he issued the counterattack directive. The Gela attack was to commence at 6:00 A.M. with the Hermann Goering Division converging on Gela from the northeast in three columns, while the Livorno Division attacked from the northwest, also in three columns.²⁴

Later in the evening, Guzzoni learned of the fall of Syracuse, and quickly realized the danger of a speedy British advance into the Catania plain and from there on to Messina, which would trap all the Axis forces on Sicily. He directed the Hermann Goering Division and Livorno Division to attack as planned, but modified the actions they would take as their attacks showed signs of success. After taking Gela and knocking out the 1st Infantry Division's beachhead, the Livorno Division was to wheel westward and attack the 3d Infantry Division's beachhead at Licata with assistance from the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division. The Hermann Goering Division was to make a feint towards Gela and wheel eastward to destroy the 45th Infantry Division's beachhead near Scoglitti, reunite with the elements of their division now in the Syracuse area, and mount a strong blow against the British beachhead south of Syracuse.

At about 6:15 A.M. on the morning of 11 July, Conrath started his three German columns toward Gela. At the same time, the Livorno Division column closest to the Germans saw them start forward and pushed off also, but the remaining two Italian columns didn't move out until the first Italian column was heavily engaging U.S. troops along highway 117 on the northeast side of Gela. German and Italian aircraft supported the attack by striking the beaches and naval vessels lying off shore. General Domenico Chirieleison, the Livorno Division commander, sent his second column forward (two battalions) along the Gela-Butera road towards the northwest side of Gela, where it was met by two Ranger companies using artillery pieces captured the day before, and naval gunfire from the cruiser *Savannah*. This hail of artillery fire destroyed the Italian column, inflicted about fifty percent casualties and stopped the advance. The third Italian column, battalion sized, had moved out by this time along the Butera Station-Gela rail line to the

west of the second Italian column, and was met by a company sized combat patrol dispatched from the 3d Infantry Division to link up with the 1st Infantry Division. The Americans inflicted heavy casualties on the Italians, who pulled back to their original positions. This battering inflicted on the Livorno Division finished it as an effective combat unit.²⁵

Meanwhile, Conrath sent a full tank battalion and most of a second towards the 1st Infantry Division's landing area. Heavy fighting erupted and the German tanks reached to within 1¼ miles of the beaches, firing on supply dumps and landing craft as they pushed forward, but American artillery units and a small force of medium tanks were able to engage the Germans at close range, though too close for naval gunfire support, and halt the advance. The rest of the second German tank battalion attacked the Piano Lupo road junction, but were forced to retire after fierce fighting and the loss of four of their six tanks. The final German column, an infantry-heavy task force, approached Gela from east of the Acate River and pushed back an American infantry company defending the Ponte Dirillo (the bridge over the Acate River), but just then a group of some 250 previously lost American paratroopers (under the command of Colonel James Gavin) moving westward towards the Piano Lupo saw the Germans and attacked their flank, halting the German advance. Fighting raged until shortly after 2:00 P.M., at which time Conrath ordered a general withdrawal after suffering the loss of nearly one-third of his 107 tanks.²⁶

After the failure of the Gela counterattacks, Guzzoni ordered the Livorno Division to hold positions on line stretching roughly from Caltagirone westward to Mazzarino. The Hermann Goering Division would hold from Caltagirone eastward to Vizzini, with

the Napoli Division spread eastward from there. Guzzoni and von Senger had by this time concluded that counterattacking the beaches again would not be possible, and that the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division would have to take positions in central Sicily to counter the 3d Infantry Division threat from Licata. And so it was that after two days of struggle the Axis field commanders had decided to modify their tactics to fight a defensive campaign.²⁷

By the night of 11 July, General Alexander, the overall Allied ground commander for the invasion, believed the bridgehead on Sicily was solid, despite the tough fighting near Gela, and that the next thing to do would be to seize the main east-west roads to the north. He decided that Seventh Army should hold firm against enemy action from the west, while Eighth Army pushed forward in the east in order to cut the enemy off. By the next evening, Alexander had decided to push Eighth Army on two axes: 13th Corps on Catania and northwards, 30th Corps northwesterly towards Caltagirone-Enna-Leonforte (then around Mount Etna and on to Messina). He wanted the 45th Infantry Division to move westwards to Niscemi and Gela while the rest of Seventh Army, at Montgomery's suggestion, would hold a line facing west and stretching from Licata in the south, through Canicatti, and on to Caltanissetta. Alexander believed once the 30th Corps reached Leonforte and Enna, the Axis troops facing Seventh Army would never get away.²⁸

On the evening of 13 July, Alexander sent instructions to this effect to the Seventh and Eighth Armies, but also modified the boundary between the two armies. The Eighth Army AOR would now include highway 124 from Vizzini, through Caltagirone, and westward to the junction with highway 117, then northward through Piazza Armerina, and on to Enna. In effect, Eighth Army was to be Alexander's hammer, while

Seventh Army was relegated to holding the west flank and conducting operations in western Sicily.²⁹ This boundary change keenly disappointed both Patton and Bradley and they interpreted the orders to mean that Alexander had less than complete confidence in his American troops despite their successful landings and tough fighting since D day. Bradley knew reassigning highway 124 to the Eighth Army meant slowing the advance of his 2d Corps, and he attempted to persuade Patton to at least allow the 45th Infantry Division to shift left along the road, but Patton would not allow it.³⁰

Patton and Bradley may have been correct in their interpretation of Alexander's new orders, given the impression Alexander had developed of the Americans after Kasserine Pass. This may help to explain why Alexander, at Montgomery's suggestion, decided to send the 30th Corps to the northwest with the idea of going around Mount Etna, and directed the Seventh Army, again at Montgomery's suggestion, to hold as mentioned previously in the west. As events unfolded in Sicily it became clear that Alexander did not really have a master plan for the campaign past the first few days. Rather, he (admittedly) preferred to await actual developments before asserting himself, and was not really inclined to do that until Seventh Army had seized its assigned airfields and Eighth Army had control of the ports of Syracuse, Augusta, and the plain of Catania. As a result, Patton and Montgomery found themselves without a firm plan of action to follow, and without much guidance from Alexander, which led them to begin acting independently of Alexander and of each other. It is interesting to note that Montgomery was the only one of the three main ground commanders to articulate a vision of the end state on Sicily before the invasion began. In early June, he outlined his thought that after

capturing Catania the general concept would be to cut off and isolate Axis forces holding out around Palermo and the rest of the island.³¹

Alexander genuinely believed the Eighth Army was better qualified for the main task of taking Messina than the Seventh Army. His new orders were designed to keep Seventh Army focused on its primary task of protecting the Eighth Army flank rather than conducting movements that might expose the Eighth Army to strong Axis counterattacks. At this time Alexander was most concerned with the network of roads that converged in the center of Sicily, the Caltanissetta-San Caterina-Enna area. As long as the Axis retained possession of these roads, Alexander feared they might use them to launch a decisive counterattack against Montgomery's left flank, which still held the possibility of leading to an Allied disaster. Thus, Alexander desired Eighth Army to hold a solid front from Enna eastward to Catania before pushing the campaign any further.³² Why Alexander continued to hold on to his negative impression of American troops is unclear, especially with their solid performance since the Kasserine Pass setback nearly five months previous.

The same day that Alexander issued his new orders to Seventh and Eighth Armies, Field Marshal Kesselring visited Mussolini and told him, as he had told OKW by phone earlier in the day, that the situation on Sicily was critical. This news dashed Mussolini's hopes of preserving Sicily that had been raised by reports of successful counterattacks on 10 July, but these reports were in error. Still, on 14 July, Mussolini saw a possibility of saving Sicily if the Germans could immediately provide more planes and reinforcements. Contradictory to Mussolini, *Comando Supremo* (the Italian military high command) believed the fate of Sicily had already been sealed, and General Vittorio

Ambrosio, the chief of *Comando Supremo*, urged Mussolini to end the war and spare Italy further waste and destruction. Kesselring was not as pessimistic as Ambrosio, but believed there was no longer any chance to mount a concerted counterattack against the Allied beachheads and the best that could be hoped for was to fight for time. Even though the situation was rapidly becoming grim, Kesselring proposed to OKW the movement of the remainder of the 1st Parachute Division, and the entire 29th Panzer Grenadier Division to Sicily. Hitler resolved to aid his embattled ally against the advice of the staff at OKW and decided to call off the offensive against the Russians at Kursk, which would free up troops to bolster the defense of Sicily. The units requested by Kesselring were directed to redeploy to Sicily, along with General Hube (and his 14th Corps headquarters) to assume tactical command of all German forces on the island, to include the defenses of the Messina Strait. Also, Hitler redefined the task of the German troops on Sicily to halt the Allied advance in front of Mount Etna on what was to be the main defensive line (the San Stefano line), or, as the Germans called it, the *Hauptkampflinie* (see appendix D). This line extended from San Stefano on the north coast, through Adrano at the southwest foot of Mount Etna, to just south of Catania on the east coast. Thus, by 15 July, Kesselring and Guzzoni were united in believing that at least part of the island could be held, but doing so would depend on German troops as the Italian units had suffered heavy casualties, were exhausted, and morale was at a low ebb.³³

The next phase of the Allied campaign lasted roughly from 13 July to 18 July. In the east, by 14 July, 13th Corps was to establish a bridgehead across the Simeto River at the Primosole Bridge, about seven miles south of Catania, and then capture Catania. Meanwhile, 30th Corps began its northwest move. The 51st Division took Vizinni on the

night of 14 July, and then Leese sent the 1st Canadian Division further northwest towards Caltagirone, while the 51st Division moved northward to the Scordia-Francofonte area.³⁴

Montgomery had pinpointed the Primosole bridge as the key to securing the Catania plain and the city itself, but it would also be a dangerous bottleneck in a successful Eighth Army advance. The plan called for a brigade-sized parachute/glider assault (Operation Fustian) to seize the bridge several hours ahead of the advancing 50th Division, which would relieve the paratroopers about dawn on 14 July. As the 50th Division moved north, tough Axis resistance near the Lentini River just south of the Catania plain slowed them.³⁵

The airborne force involved 145 aircraft (126 carrying paratroopers and nineteen towing gliders), which were to approach Sicily from the south five miles off the east coast and then turn west as they reached a point directly abeam of the mouth of the Simeto River. Unfortunately, as the force turned west, friendly naval vessels fired upon them. The aircraft scattered, some making their drops more than twenty miles from the drop zone, while fourteen aircraft were shot down, and more than forty aircraft returned to base without dropping. Of the 1,856 men in the airborne fleet, only 295 landed at or near the Primosole bridge. Fortunately for the British airborne troops, the only Axis force defending the bridge was a small Italian security detail, which was quickly routed, and the objective was in hand. But the Germans counterattacked in the early morning hours of 14 July, and after a tough day of fighting retook the bridge at about 6:30 P.M. At about this time British reinforcements began to arrive, and this would have been an excellent time to conduct a counterattack (before the Germans had a chance to consolidate their hold on the bridge), but the arriving troops, who had been marching nearly constantly

since D day, were exhausted and in no shape to conduct a counterattack and the fight ended for the day. This would not be the last time a chronic lack of wheeled transportation would hinder Eighth Army operations.³⁶

At 7:30 A.M. on the morning of 15 July units from the 50th Division renewed the assault at the bridge. One battalion attacked head-on, and a platoon managed to reach the other side temporarily, but heavy Axis fire kept the rest of the battalion pinned on the south side of the Simeto all day.³⁷ Replacing the Italian defenders at the bridge were crack troops from the German 1st Parachute Division, supported by part of a battery of parachute artillery (seventy-five millimeter guns) and a few eighty-eight millimeter guns. In short the Axis had enough forces to put up a tough fight for the bridge, with other reinforcements entering the area as the 50th Division began their attack.³⁸

The British could make no headway on 15 July, so Montgomery and Dempsey planned a commando assault on Catania from the sea on the night of 16 July, and new orders to the 50th Division entailed taking advantage of this operation, which planned to renew the bridge assault in the early hours of 16 July, as there would be more artillery support in place. The plan called for two infantry companies to ford the river about one-half mile inland of the bridge, and then swing through the orchards on the north side of the river and attack from the west well before daylight. The two companies set out and forded the river on time, but their communications gear (notorious for its unreliability) got wet and would not work. Heavy fog compounded this communications problem and since the main force waiting to cross the bridge did not know the status of their two companies across the river, they held off their attack until first-light. When they finally attacked, the fog (which would not clear until late morning) prevented them from seeing

the well-concealed enemy positions and they were unable to advance. A tactical stalemate ensued, which led Montgomery and Dempsey to postpone the commando assault on Catania until the night of the 17 July. This would give the 50th Division more time to enlarge their bridgehead.³⁹

At 1:00 A.M. on 17 July, Dempsey sent one battalion across the bridge and one across the fords to the west and after about twelve hours of pitched battle the 50th Division had advanced about one mile past the bridge. The enemy fell back to defensive positions near the Fosso Bottaceto, a large, dry irrigation channel, 2½ miles north of the bridge, but still three miles south of Catania. Montgomery now believed that thrusts in all sectors would break the enemy who he believed was very stretched. He thus scrapped the commando assault on Catania, and ordered the 50th Division to push up to the Fosso Bottaceto to clear the way for a 5th Division assault to Misterbianco, five miles west of Catania. The 50th Division attacked again, and pushed to within 200 yards of the Bottaceto, but the attack stalled once again due to stiff German resistance and the British troops took up defensive positions about 1,000 yards from the Bottaceto.⁴⁰

The battle at the Primosole bridge showed that despite the relatively unchecked success of the Allied advance before this time, Sicily would not fall easily to the Allies and much tough fighting remained. Additionally, it roughly marked the point at which Allied strategy began to fray. Montgomery's decision, with Alexander's concurrence, to send 30th Corps to the northwest around Mount Etna, thereby giving up Eighth Army's advantage of mass, must be questioned, though at the time relatively light Axis resistance might have pointed to the possible success of such a move. But relatively light resistance would soon turn to stubborn resistance on the Catania plain in the east and Eighth Army's

lack of mass, brought on partly by 30th Corps' shift to the northwest and partly by Eighth Army's lack of adequate wheeled transportation, would effectively result in a halt to Eighth Army's northward drive for a time. Montgomery and Alexander would have done better to keep 30th Corps moving parallel to 13th Corps, since it was fairly clear that Seventh Army was ably accomplishing their mission of watching his (Montgomery's) left flank. The fact that Bradley's 2d Corps had to slow their advance and change direction to let 30th Corps move northwest clearly showed that Seventh Army was in the place they needed to be. Alexander was certainly in a position to see this and could have directed Montgomery to concentrate the 30th Corps more in the east and thus able to lend strong support to 13th Corps as they reached the Catania plain. However, as Alexander really didn't have more than a generalized plan in mind past the first few days of the campaign, it is understandable that his two strong-willed tactical commanders, Montgomery and Patton, would begin to make their own plans. Additionally, Alexander's negative perception of American fighting ability likely contributed to his decision to go along with Montgomery's proposal to send 30th Corps to the northwest.

In the meantime, Patton had already been thinking of a thrust towards Palermo and had obtained permission from Alexander for the 3d Infantry Division to conduct a reconnaissance in force toward Agrigento and Porto Empedocle on the coast (west of Licata), both of which they seized by the early afternoon of 16 July. With Agrigento in hand, Seventh Army was now in position to attack northward toward Palermo. In anticipation of a Palermo offensive, Patton had also organized the 3d Infantry Division and the 82d Airborne Division into a provisional corps commanded by his deputy, Major General Geoffrey Keyes.⁴¹

Also on 16 July, Alexander issued a new directive to Patton and Montgomery (which Patton didn't receive until nearly midnight). It stated that after Eighth Army captured Catania and the nearby Gerbini airfields, and the network of roads in the Enna-Caltanissetta area, it was to drive the enemy into the Messina peninsula along three axes: northward from Catania, eastward from Leonforte through Regalbuto and Adrano, and eastward from Nicosia through Troina and Randazzo. To Patton, the new orders meant Seventh Army would continue in what he perceived as a passive role of protecting Eighth Army by holding the road near Enna-Caltanissetta and by thrusting north to capture Petralia on Highway 120, the important east-west route through northern Sicily.⁴²

Patton flew to Alexander's headquarters in Tunisia on 17 July with the intent to protest the assigned "passive" role of Seventh Army and to propose an attack on Palermo. Patton based his case on two points: (1) the original Husky plan had identified Palermo as essential to the successful conclusion of the campaign, and (2) if Seventh Army continued in its present role the campaign would end with U.S. forces playing nothing more than a minor role as Montgomery's flank guard.⁴³ Patton's suggestion caught Alexander somewhat by surprise, but Alexander acquiesced and on 19 July the Seventh Army's drive to Palermo commenced.

Alexander's new orders to Seventh and Eighth Armies ironically coincided with the planned Axis withdrawal to the San Stefano line. These actions had the net effect that while Axis forces withdrew to the east and consolidated, Allied forces were giving up a significant portion of their mass advantage in the east by spreading out to the west, that is, 30th Corps moving to the northwest to go around Mount Etna and approach Messina from the west, and Seventh Army moving on Palermo.

Meanwhile, on 16 July, General Guzzoni ordered General Eberhardt Rodt and his 15th Panzer Grenadier Division to begin withdrawing northeastward to take up defensive positions from Agira to Leonforte and on to Nicosia and Gangi to block a potential Allied drive on Catania from the west (see appendix D). By the morning of 17 July they were in place. Also on 16 July, Guzzoni received the news that the Allies had taken Agrigento. He knew the Americans were now in position to cut off the Italian 12th Corps with a drive to the north, so he ordered 12th Corps to withdraw immediately eastward to a defensive line running from Cerda (east of Palermo) along highway 120 to Nicosia. Finally, to defend Palermo, Guzzoni ordered the 208th Coastal Division to take charge of all coastal units near Palermo and to keep highway 113 open between Palermo and Cerda.⁴⁴

Thus, by 17 July, only a week into the campaign, decisions by both Alexander and Guzzoni had set the final shape of operations that led to the eventual Axis evacuation of Sicily (discussed in chapter 1). The Axis mobile divisions were backing eastward towards the San Stefano line, the Seventh Army was preparing to clear western Sicily, and the Eighth Army was still bogged down at the southern end of the Catania plain.

By 22 July, Keyes' provisional corps had captured Palermo, and by the end of 23 July had overrun all of western Sicily, while the 2d Corps had driven to the north coast near Termini Imerese (30 miles east of Palermo). The capture of Palermo, though an important milestone for Seventh Army, was not a significant strategic gain for the Allied effort, though its port would prove advantageous in the build up of supplies for a Seventh Army move toward Messina, which was the new Seventh Army objective as directed by Alexander in instructions issued on 20 July. Patton's army was to employ maximum

strength in a drive eastward along the north coast road (highway 113) and the next main east-west road to the south (highway 120). Eighth Army was to continue to attempt to break the stalemate along the east coast and, together, both armies were to converge on Messina and finish off the remaining Axis forces.⁴⁵

Geography would be a major factor in the Seventh Army's advance along the north coast. Between the two major east-west routes and parallel to them stood the Caronie Mountains, the highest peaks on Sicily (save for Mount Etna itself), which ran in a line from west of San Stefano to just short of Messina. As the mountains dropped down to the north coast, they created a washboard-like effect with a large number of short streams flowing down from the mountains to the sea. The streams, and the bridges that crossed them, were significant obstacles, but the steep ridges that separated the streams were even more difficult to traverse and provided the Germans even stronger positions. On the south side of the mountains the inland east-west route was narrow and crooked, with steep grades and sharp turns. Like the coast road, there were numerous areas where strong defensive positions could easily be set up. Though only a few miles apart, the two axes of advance were not mutually supporting, which greatly magnified supply problems.⁴⁶

As Seventh Army pushed into western Sicily, Axis forces were withdrawing toward the San Stefano line and operating in three main groups. The first, composed mostly of units from the Hermann Goering and 1st Parachute Divisions (and remnants of the Livorno and Napoli Divisions), was holding the line of the Dittaino River from the Fosso Bottaceto (south of Catania) to Dittaino Station, about forty-two miles to the west. There the 13th Corps and the 51st Division of the 30th Corps faced them. The second

group, the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division, was withdrawing from the Caltanissetta-Piazza Armerina area to the Leonforte-Nicosia area. On their left (east) flank they were engaged by the 1st Canadian Division (30th Corps), while the 1st Infantry Division and 45th Infantry Division (2d Corps) faced them on the right (west) flank. The third group was the Italian 12th Corps (the Assietta and Aosta Divisions), which was withdrawing from the Corleone vicinity eastward to the San Stefano-Nicosia area.⁴⁷ In addition, elements of the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division occupied positions along highway 113, the north coast road. All the Allies could realistically hope to do now was drive the Axis forces off the island; the chance for Allied land forces to cut off significant Axis forces and capture a large amount of troops had, for the most part, disappeared.⁴⁸

The fall of Mussolini on 25 July had little influence on the conduct of operations on Sicily. However, it did push Hitler to the realization that Sicily would eventually have to be vacated, which led to OKW's 26 July directive (discussed in chapter 1) to Kesselring to prepare German forces for evacuation from Sicily. As German forces now made up the preponderance of forces in the defense, Hube assumed control of the actual conduct of Axis ground operations on Sicily, though Guzzoni technically remained in tactical command. Hube's assumption of command and his employment of German divisions ended the rapid advances of the Seventh Army as they now struck for Messina. As Axis forces assumed positions on the San Stefano line, preparations on the Etna line (San Fratello-Troina-Adrano-Acireale), the first of Hube's five defensive lines, were underway in earnest.⁴⁹

Though more than three weeks of tough fighting remained before the Sicily campaign came to an end, the coming battles and withdrawals of Axis forces were clearly

leading to one conclusion: the evacuation of Sicily. Allied commanders and national leadership were all pondering the question of what action to take after Sicily, but it appears that little, if any, discussion took place concerning the possibility of trapping Axis forces on Sicily before they had a chance to evacuate. On 22 July, Alexander wired Churchill that the Allies intended to conduct an amphibious assault to establish a bridgehead on mainland Italy at the first opportunity. However, this assault never took place during the Sicily campaign, even though the allies had plans in the making to land on the “toe” of Calabria (Operation Buttress), and a plan to land at Crotona in eastern Calabria (Operation Goblet).⁵⁰ About one week later, even Eisenhower broached the subject of landing a division in the Naples area, but again, no action was taken.⁵¹ So, though an occasional instant of thought in the direction of trapping Axis forces emerged, no serious effort was made to take action and accomplish such a move. The cost of letting these German divisions get away intact would involve facing them again on the Italian mainland in the near future.

At the end of the Sicily campaign, Eisenhower spoke of the Allies’ too cautious approach in planning for and conducting Operation Husky. It would have been better, Eisenhower thought, to make simultaneous landings on both sides of the Messina Strait. This action, he acknowledged, would likely have cut off Sicily and resulted in the eventual wholesale surrender of Axis forces, while saving Allied resources for an attack on the Italian mainland. Kesselring, in his postwar assessment, wholeheartedly agreed with Eisenhower’s thoughts on the Sicily campaign and criticized the Allied conduct of it, especially the Seventh Army’s offensive on Palermo, and the lack of a secondary Allied landing on the Calabrian peninsula.⁵²

As Axis forces prepared for and conducted the evacuation of Sicily, it is clear the Allied Operational commanders, Alexander, Tedder, and Cunningham, knew it. On 3 August, Alexander cabled Tedder and Cunningham about being in position to strike at the evacuation with air and naval power.⁵³ However, it is not clear why these commanders never produced a joint effort to stop the evacuation. On 7 August, Montgomery lamented about the lack of a plan to stop the evacuation and criticized the Allied lack of inter-service cooperation.⁵⁴ In the end, there would be no joint effort coordinated by Alexander or Eisenhower to stop the flow of Axis troops and material across the Messina Strait. Though German losses during the campaign were heavy (the three combat divisions that fought on Sicily were down to between fifty and sixty-five percent strength),⁵⁵ they were able to reinforce and prepare for the upcoming battles on the Italian mainland.

¹Donald S. Detwiler, ed., *World War II German Military Studies*, vol. 14 (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1979), 57.

²Carlo D'Este, *Bitter Victory* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1988), 23.

³Albert N. Garland, Howard M. Smyth, and Martin Blumenson, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1965), 86.

⁴*Ibid.*, 87.

⁵*Ibid.*, 88-89.

⁶Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., ed., *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower, The War Years: II* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), 1,230-1,233.

⁷Garland, Smyth, and Blumenson, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 88-89.

⁸C. J. C. Molony et al., *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, vol. 5 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1973), 26-27.

⁹Garland, Smyth, and Blumenson, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 96-97.

- ¹⁰Ibid., 97.
- ¹¹Ibid., 98.
- ¹²Molony et al., *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, vol. 5, 53.
- ¹³Garland, Smyth, and Blumenson, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 108-109.
- ¹⁴Chandler, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, 1,104.
- ¹⁵Molony et al., *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, vol. 5, 55.
- ¹⁶Garland, Smyth, and Blumenson, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 110-111.
- ¹⁷Ibid., 115-117.
- ¹⁸Ibid., 117-119.
- ¹⁹Molony et al., *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, vol. 5, 59-62.
- ²⁰Garland, Smyth, and Blumenson, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 123-146.
- ²¹Ibid., 120-121, 147.
- ²²Ibid., 150-155.
- ²³Molony et al., *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, vol. 5, 81-82.
- ²⁴Garland, Smyth, and Blumenson, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 163-164.
- ²⁵Ibid., 169-170.
- ²⁶Ibid., 168-171.
- ²⁷Molony et al., *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, vol. 5, 85.
- ²⁸Ibid., 87-88.
- ²⁹Ibid., 89.
- ³⁰Garland, Smyth, and Blumenson, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 210.
- ³¹D'Este, *Bitter Victory*, 321-325.
- ³²Garland, Smyth, and Blumenson, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 211.
- ³³Ibid., 212-216.

- ³⁴Molony et al., *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, vol. 5, 93.
- ³⁵D'Este, *Bitter Victory*, 350.
- ³⁶*Ibid.*, 361-376.
- ³⁷Molony et al., *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, vol. 5, 102-103.
- ³⁸D'Este, *Bitter Victory*, 367.
- ³⁹Molony et al., *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, vol. 5, 103-104.
- ⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 104-105.
- ⁴¹Garland, Smyth, and Blumenson, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 230.
- ⁴²Molony et al., *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, vol. 5, 107-108.
- ⁴³D'Este, *Bitter Victory*, 416.
- ⁴⁴Garland, Smyth, and Blumenson, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 237-238.
- ⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 304.
- ⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 309.
- ⁴⁷Molony et al., *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, vol. 5, 111-112.
- ⁴⁸Chandler, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, 1,260.
- ⁴⁹Garland, Smyth, and Blumenson, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 306-309.
- ⁵⁰Molony et al., *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, vol. 5, 123-124.
- ⁵¹Harry C. Butcher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower* (New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1946), 372.
- ⁵²D'Este, *Bitter Victory*, 525-526.
- ⁵³*Ibid.*, 527.
- ⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 546.
- ⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 607-608.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

There is no question that Operation Husky was ultimately a successful Allied effort that achieved the major objectives set for it. However, General Eisenhower's comments about the Allies' over-cautious approach to the Sicily campaign and subsequent lack of secondary landings on the Calabrian peninsula clearly indicate he understood the missed opportunity to trap the Axis armies on Sicily. Escaping with a large amount of their equipment intact ensured the Axis, especially the German troops, maintained the capability to fight the upcoming battles on mainland Italy.

The primary research question was: did an opportunity exist for the Allies to trap and compel the capitulation of Axis forces during the Sicily campaign? The answer must be yes. Why the Allies allowed this to happen and the consequences of these actions create the framework of a timeless lesson to military professionals in the art of leadership and high command at the operational level of war.

Arriving at an answer to the research question involved analyzing the campaign from three different areas. The first was the decision process whereby Allied political leaders chose to invade Sicily. The key here was determining whether or not strategic guidance from political leaders provided military leaders at the strategic and operational levels of war the direction and latitude they needed to plan and execute a successful campaign. The planning cycle for Operation Husky is of special importance and is the second key area of analysis. The primary military commanders involved in the North Africa campaign, Generals Alexander, Montgomery, and Patton, were the same officers

who would lead the Sicily invasion. Since the last months of the North Africa campaign and the planning for Operation Husky occurred simultaneously, the planning cycle and the level of participation on the part of the primary ground commanders became a point of concern. Thirdly, a review of decisions made by the triumvirate of Alexander, Montgomery, and Patton during the actual operation yields several clues as to why the Axis evacuation turned out as successful as it was.

Strategic Guidance

When Churchill and Roosevelt met at Casablanca (January 1943) they were under great pressure from Stalin, who did not attend the conference, to open a second front against the Axis in Europe as soon as possible. Though Stalin may not have actually voiced it, Churchill and Roosevelt were certainly aware the possibility existed for a peace arrangement between the Russians and the Germans. Such an agreement would leave the Axis to focus their still considerable military strength on Britain and the United States, which would obviously make the Allied task significantly more difficult. From Churchill's view, the build up time to conduct a cross-channel invasion from Britain into France, the option preferred by the U.S. Chiefs of Staff, would leave the Russians to fight on alone in the east for yet a considerable time. Such action could increase the chances of Russia losing patience and attempting to make peace with Germany.

The only place the Allies could quickly open a new front in Europe was in the Mediterranean, as they already had considerable fighting forces in North Africa. This situation dovetailed with Churchill's position of continuing Mediterranean operations aimed at the soft underbelly of the Axis. Thus, at the Casablanca Conference, Roosevelt

and Churchill decided upon Sicily as the next Allied target upon completion of the North Africa campaign.

The strategic guidance provided to Eisenhower as commanding general of the AEF consisted mainly of the chain of command for Husky (which was very similar to that already implemented for the North Africa campaign), the target, Sicily, and a planned invasion date, July (June if possible). The guidance also directed Eisenhower to set up a separate planning staff dedicated to Sicily planning and included an outline plan as a starting point. Overall, the strategic guidance was solid and permitted the latitude needed to plan a successful operation. Though problems would later surface within the Husky planning organizations, the problems were not resultant from the strategic guidance originating from Allied political leadership.

The Husky Planning Cycle

As planning for Operation Husky commenced, proper coordination between the various planning staffs quickly became a difficult problem. As stated in chapter 3, planning for the ground operation alone was ongoing in five different locations, while planning for air and naval operations took place in still other locations. A further complicating factor was that the principal ground commanders for Husky, Alexander, Montgomery, and Patton, were still heavily involved in the North Africa campaign. This fact limited the amount of time and input they could provide to Husky planning. Another problem was the comparative inexperience of Alexander's planning staff (Force 141) with an operation of the size and scope of Husky. As the end of the North Africa campaign drew near, Montgomery developed misgivings with the Husky plan as originally conceived (with landings in southeastern and western Sicily), and as discussed

previously, proposed that both the Seventh and Eighth Armies land in the southeast and drive side-by-side to the north for Messina. Montgomery's scheme ensured the two armies would retain the capability to mutually support each other, which they would not be able to do in the original plan. While these changes caused much consternation amongst the planning staffs, they were not tactically unsound moves, and could have facilitated trapping Axis forces on Sicily and forcing their eventual surrender had senior AEF commanders focused on the opportunity.

Even though Alexander had not clearly outlined a vision for conduct of the campaign, Montgomery had deduced an opportunity to trap the Axis forces more than a month before it began. One must wonder why other senior American and British leaders apparently did not see the same thing. As discussed in chapter 1, even if senior Allied generals were not inclined to aggressively seek opportunities to trap large pockets of enemy forces, adequate opportunity certainly existed to review and learn from earlier operations. It is possible AEF leaders and planners were not paying close enough attention to events on the eastern front. It is also possible they were simply overly cautious in their approach to the Sicily campaign, as General Eisenhower suggested.

If there was a real problem with the final Husky plan, it was that it did not adequately address future tasks for the Seventh and Eighth Armies past the first few days of the campaign. Indeed, Alexander has been criticized for "not having a plan," but he knew that no plan survives first contact with the enemy, and believed the plan as written permitted maximum flexibility in determining the composition of future operations based on the tactical situation. On the surface this seems reasonable, after all, the push to Messina was clearly the Allied objective. A better solution might have involved

Alexander directing his Force 141 staff to plan the operation completely through to the seizure of Messina, at least in concept, and then explore and codify branch plans to address potential Allied difficulties. This would have given Montgomery, and especially Patton, clearer direction and additional time to think through how to best accomplish Alexander's guidance in concert with each other. Additionally, it would likely have brought out earlier (before the campaign began) some of the smoldering resentment developed by Patton and several other Seventh Army leaders regarding the perceived "back seat" role delegated to them by Alexander during the actual campaign.

Though Alexander had a somewhat negative opinion of American fighting ability he was not unreasonable, and likely would have seen the importance of a prominent role for the Seventh Army. It is arguable that Alexander's eventual approval of Patton's push toward Palermo was recognition of this, with additional support of this position supplied by Alexander's subsequent direction to Seventh Army to drive eastward along the north coast toward Messina in conjunction with Eighth Army's final push from the south.

In the final analysis, the somewhat disjointed Husky planning cycle certainly did not take the invasion plan as far as it might have to provide Montgomery and Patton the guidance necessary to continue operations. The result of this shortfall was some confusion during the actual conduct of the operation (such as during the early stages of the campaign when Alexander changed the boundary between Seventh and Eighth Armies), and the eventual loss of the opportunity to trap Axis forces on Sicily.

The Invasion and Reduction of Sicily

The Allied amphibious landings on the southeast Sicily coast were much easier than expected as the Axis' first line of defense, the Italian coastal units, put up only

sporadic resistance at best. This was fortunate for the Allies because the navigation difficulties encountered by the Allied airborne troop transports resulted in only a handful of airborne troops in the proper landing zones near Syracuse and the Piano Lupo area. As the Allies strengthened their beachheads, the only serious Axis efforts at a counterattack occurred in the U.S. 1st Infantry Division's zone near Gela. Though there was some extremely tough fighting during the Axis counterattack on 10 July, and again on 11 July, a lack of communication between the attacking formations ensured poor coordination and the ultimate failure of the Axis counterattacks.

As Allied troops pushed northward they were not substantially slowed, other than in the 1st Infantry Division's sector, until 14 July when the British 13th Corps arrived at the Primosole bridge on southern end of the Catania plain. It was here that several factors combined to practically halt the Eighth Army for several days. First, the British divisions were short of wheeled transportation, a factor compounded before the invasion began when the 1st Canadian Division lost 500 vehicles during their transit from the U.K. Second, the rapid Eighth Army advance to Syracuse and further northward to Catania had units spread out and tired. Third, the relative ease of the Eighth Army advance to this point lead Montgomery to press Alexander to change plans by ordering the 30th Corps to move northwest towards Enna, which had the effect of thinning out the Eighth Army along a much wider front. These factors and the extremely tough fighting about to occur along the five miles between the Primosole bridge and Catania brought Montgomery to a standstill. It would be 5 August before the Eighth Army would finally capture Catania and continue the drive north.

It was at this point that the opportunity to trap Axis forces began to slip away. Had Alexander resisted Montgomery's suggestion to allow 30th Corps to move northwest, the Eighth Army would have had much more mass near the Catania plain. It is then likely they would have taken the Primosole bridge and, subsequently, Catania, several days earlier (possibly before Axis reinforcements had the chance to move into position) and continued their push to the north. As it was, Seventh Army, which was moving directly north toward Enna prior to the change of orders, had to also change direction to allow 30th Corps to get in place for their attacks. It is arguable the entire northward drive by Allied forces was slowed by this change of plans.

The second major decision that shaped the final outcome of the campaign now took place. As the British 30th Corps began moving northwest, the U.S. 45th Infantry Division halted in place and began moving westward. It became clear to Patton and other Seventh Army leaders that the Eighth Army would now be positioned to conduct all the major operations of the campaign with Seventh Army relegated to a flank guard role. After Messina, the next major target on Sicily was the capital city of Palermo. In the original Husky plan, later modified at Montgomery's suggestion, Palermo was the major target for Seventh Army, and Patton was able to convince Alexander that taking Palermo was still an appropriate objective. There were still two Italian mobile divisions and the German 15th Panzer Grenadier Division in western Sicily, but when Patton's Seventh Army struck north for Palermo, General Guzzoni ordered these Axis formations to begin a general withdrawal to the east and thus, by the time Patton took Palermo on 22 July, the general outline of forces was in place for the tough battles to come. Axis forces retired to the San Stefano line and planning soon began for the eventual evacuation of the island.

Once Axis forces occupied the San Stefano line there was little Alexander's land forces could do to prevent the evacuation despite the fact that the line was long and the fronts occupied by the major Axis forces defending it were not locked into each other. Additionally, there were relatively few Axis troops in comparison to the space occupied. Still, Allied forces were not able to conduct rapid, deep penetrations to crack open whole sectors, mainly due to the geography of Sicily, especially the funnel-shaped northeast corner. As Axis forces withdrew from one defensive line to the next, the lines became shorter (due to the funnel-shaped geography) and thus took fewer troops to defend. For moves covering some distance, mechanized troops were generally bound to the road network, which was mostly narrow, hilly, and winding. The most practical routes of approach to Allied objectives were usually also the most obvious, that is, the roads. This fact favored the defense, and Axis forces well knew how to use this natural advantage.

It is entirely possible that shortsightedness on the part of Alexander and Patton brought about this situation in the land campaign. Even with Montgomery's plan to push 30th Corps around Mount Etna, there was still an opportunity to trap a major portion of the Axis defenders, and a more meaningful mission for Seventh Army (rather than the push for Palermo) would have been a hard strike to the northeast (towards Mount Etna). Such a move held the possibility of trapping the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division, the Aosta Division, and the Assieta Division in western Sicily before they had a chance to move east and occupy positions on the San Stefano line. A follow up drive toward Messina could have then trapped the Hermann Goering Division and the remnants of the Livorno and Napoli Divisions near Mount Etna if they were slow to attempt evacuation along the only route that would have been left open to them, the north-south running

Highway 114 on the east coast between Mount Etna and the sea. Concentration of air assets and naval bombardment along the escape route could have seriously retarded Axis evacuation attempts.

As discussed previously, Alexander's two decisions set the final land conditions for the eventual Axis evacuation. When the first decision (30th Corp's northwest move) was made, it appeared tactically sound based on the hitherto light resistance. Of course, the situation soon changed and Axis resistance stiffened significantly as Eighth Army attempted to advance across the Catania plain. By this time the second decision (Palermo) was made. It is entirely possible that Alexander, who had not yet indicated an inclination to trap the Axis forces on the island, made the Palermo decision because he came to the realization that, politically, the Americans needed a more significant mission than guarding Montgomery's flank. However, in combination the two decisions curbed any chance to trap the Axis armies.

As it was, Allied air forces flew hundreds of sorties against targets in the Messina Strait, but had little influence on the Axis evacuation. This was chiefly due to Colonel Baade's extensive anti-aircraft defense network, which made attacks on the Axis evacuation flotilla extremely hazardous. Additionally, Allied naval forces did not take any significant action to stop the evacuation. As with the anti-aircraft defenses, Baade had emplaced several large shore guns that would have made an attempt by Allied naval forces to stop the evacuation a most difficult, if not suicidal, proposition. What might be concluded from a cursory look at the air and naval situation is that if the evacuation was to be stopped it would be land forces that would have to do it. This view makes it easy to lambaste the land commanders for their narrow focus on taking Sicily, and not also

looking to trap the Axis forces defending it. This view misses a key point about the command structure of Operation Husky.

As previously noted, the Husky command setup consisted of Eisenhower as the overall AEF commander and three British officers the principal deputies for land, air, and sea. This setup left most of the actual operational decision-making in the hands of General Alexander, Air Chief Marshal Tedder, and Admiral Cunningham. On paper, the structure doesn't look much different from the type of command structure we might see in an American operation today, that is, a joint force commander, and separate component commanders for the land, air, and sea (components). However, the command setup took no account of the differences in how each ally viewed the command climate. The senior officers involved furthermore did not recognize (or at least did not act upon) the possibility of problems arising from their different views. Eisenhower, as overall Allied commander-in-chief, concerned himself primarily with strategic details and expected Alexander, as deputy commander-in-chief, to handle the operational details. This is not surprising because this is how the American system generally operated. On the other hand, Alexander, Tedder and Cunningham, accustomed to operating within the British "command by committee" system, tended to focus on their respective components. As mentioned in chapter 3, this hindered coordination, and Alexander did not intervene. Ultimately, the air effort to stop the evacuation failed, the land effort was focused on occupying ground (not stopping the Axis evacuation), and there really was no direct naval effort to halt the evacuation. One can only speculate on what result might have been achieved had Eisenhower or Alexander been more forceful in pushing coordination between the three components to stop the evacuation. This likely would

have taken a firm hand on the part of Eisenhower, which may have caused problems within the alliance that he worked so diligently to strengthen. Examination of the coordination between Allied components during the Sicily campaign (or during World War II in general), or the decisions taken by each component and the influence of other components on them would be a useful addition to the literature on this problem.

The Final Analysis

That the Allies did not make a serious attempt to trap Axis forces on Sicily was certainly a lost opportunity, but war is full of lost opportunities readily seen in hindsight; Operation Husky is not unique in that characteristic. Overall, the Sicily campaign was a great tactical victory for the Allies that kept the initiative in their hands and the Axis on its heels, both in the Mediterranean and on the eastern front.

It is not the intent of this thesis to criticize the decisions made, or not made, by commanders in the field, merely to show that an opportunity presented itself and was not seized. The lesson for modern commanders concerning the lost opportunity in Sicily is the importance of establishing firm unity of command and communicating a clear vision and commander's intent to subordinate commanders. That would allow them to exercise personal and operational initiative as the situation warrants and still keep their unit(s) pressing forward to meet the superior commander's ultimate objectives.

It is arguable that had Alexander and/or Eisenhower provided a better outline for the conduct of Operation Husky, Montgomery and Patton would have been more focused on the ultimate land objective and better able to see opportunities that presented themselves along the way. Additionally, and unfortunately for the Allies, Alexander did not aggressively follow up with Tedder and Cunningham respective to the 3 August cable

concerning the evacuation. This lack of coordination between the land, air, and sea arms ultimately doomed the Allied opportunity to stop the evacuation.

Coordination between services may appear simpler when one nation conducts an operation under the command system used by U.S. forces today. However, as Operation Husky shows, when another nation's forces are involved the difficulties in assessing combined capabilities, understanding standard national practices, determining appropriate objectives, and assigning appropriate missions are compounded. These types of coalition operational difficulties are ones we will continue to face for the foreseeable future. We must know they exist and be prepared to solve them, while keeping a watchful eye on the ultimate operational objectives assigned by senior political and military leaders.

APPENDIX A

ORGANIZATION OF AXIS FORCES FOR THE DEFENSE OF SICILY

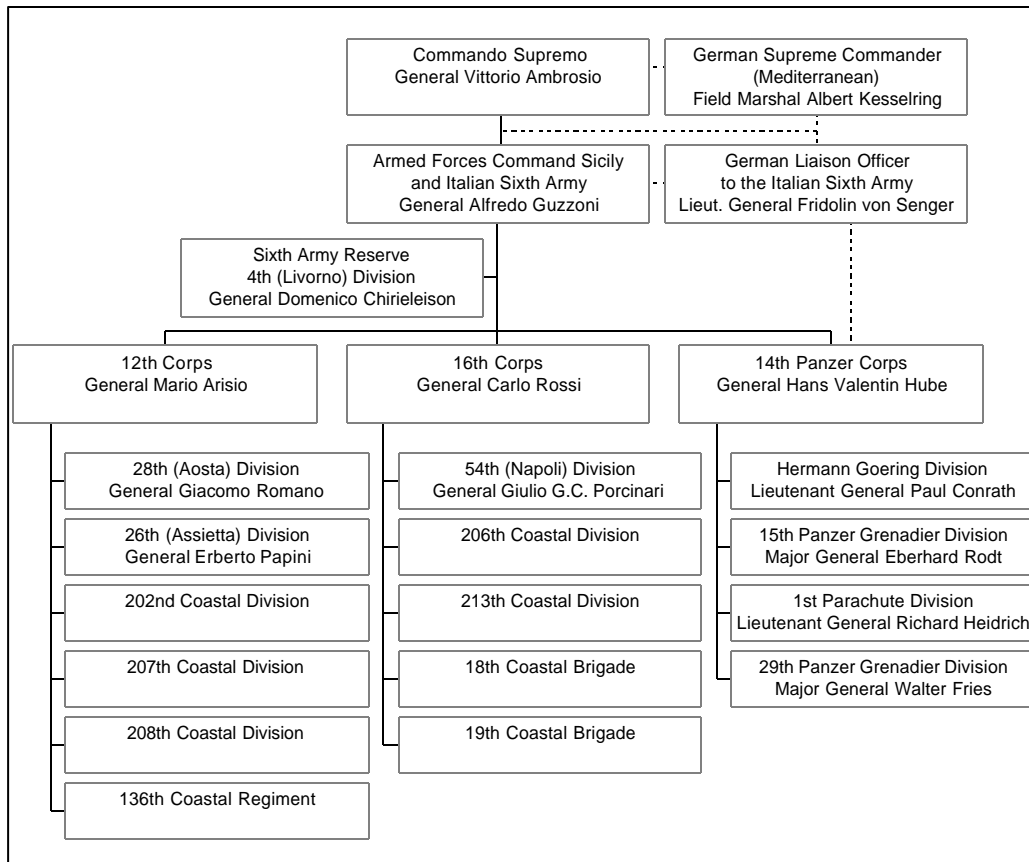


Chart shows major unit command structure of Axis forces on Sicily. Though General Guzzoni technically exercised command over the 14th Panzer Corps, Field Marshal Kesselring, and to some extent General von Senger, exercised actual command authority over the German units in theater. Chart created by author from information obtained from the following sources: Carlo D'Este's *Bitter Victory* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1988); Albert N. Garland's *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1965); and C. J. C. Molony's *The Mediterranean and the Middle East*, vol. 4 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1973).

APPENDIX B

ORGANIZATION OF ALLIED FORCES FOR OPERATION HUSKY

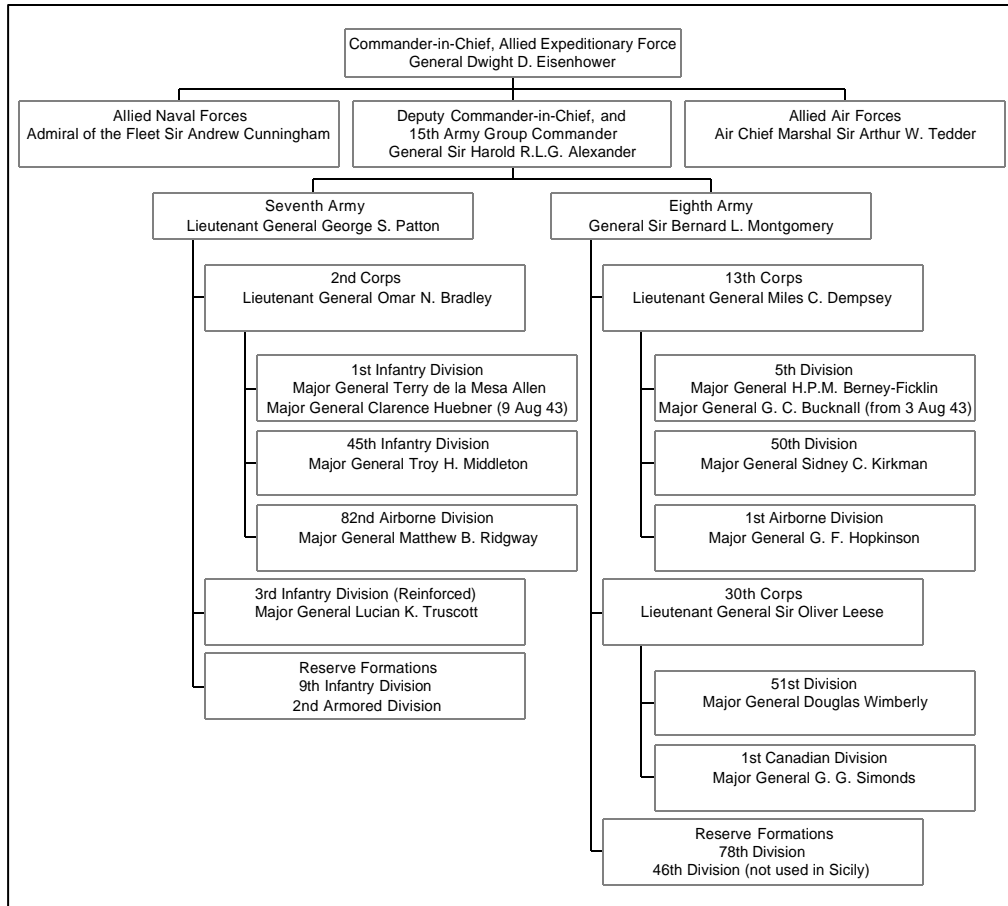


Chart shows the command structure of major Allied ground forces for Operation HUSKY. It does not show the provisional corps (commanded by General Keyes and consisting of the 3rd Infantry Division and 82nd Airborne Division) created by General Patton several days into the invasion. Chart created by author from information obtained from the following sources: Carlo D'Este's *Bitter Victory* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1988); Albert N. Garland's *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1965); and C. J. C. Molony's *The Mediterranean and the Middle East*, vol. 4 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1973).

APPENDIX C

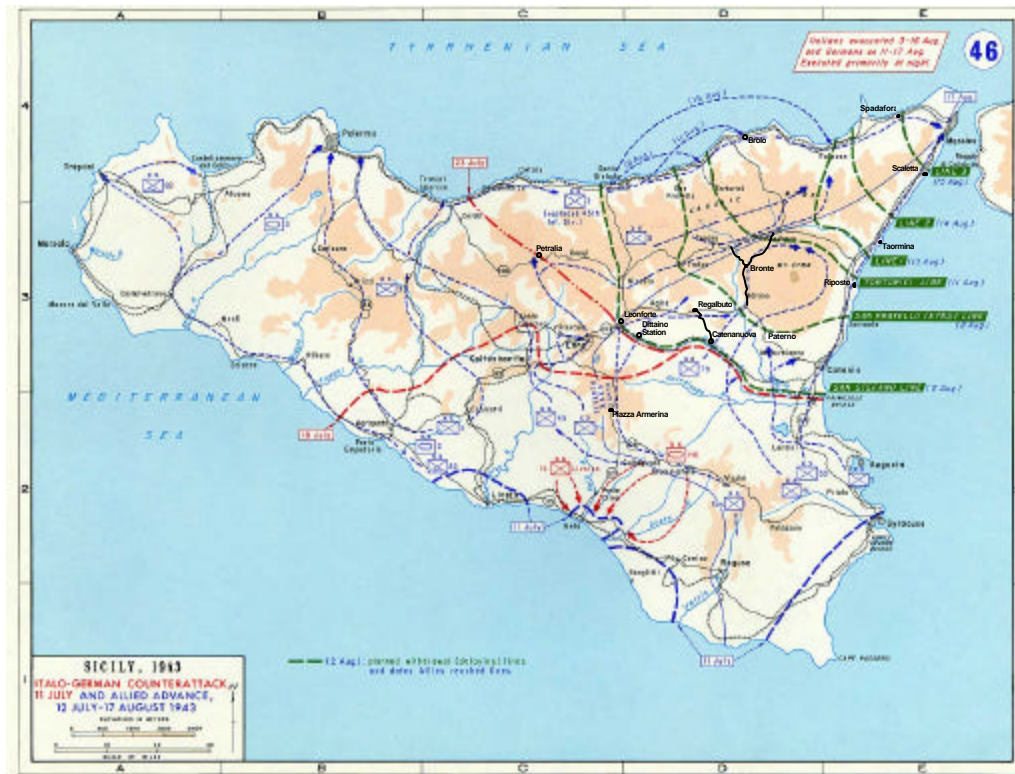
ALLIED INVASION MAP AND AXIS DISPOSITIONS



Map of Sicily shows organization of Allied landing force and disposition of Axis defense forces on 10 July 1943. Reprinted, by permission, U.S. Military Academy Online Map Library, World War II maps of the European Theater; available from www.dean.usma.edu/history/dhistorymaps/atlaspercent20page.htm. Internet.

APPENDIX D

FORCE MOVEMENTS AND DEFENSE LINES



Map of Sicily shows major force movements after the initial Allied landings and the different defense lines used by Axis forces as the campaign progressed. Reprinted, by permission, U.S. Military Academy Online Map Library, World War II maps of the European Theater; available from www.dean.usma.edu/history/dhistorymaps/atlaspercent20page.htm. Internet.

GLOSSARY

Comando Supremo. The Italian military high command.

D day. Name given the day a military operation begins.

E-boat. Allied name given to German motor torpedo boats. Similar in design to a U.S. Navy PT boat, but slightly larger.

Force 141. The Operation HUSKY planning staff for General Alexander's 15th Army Group (consisting of Seventh Army and Eighth Army).

Force 343. The Operation HUSKY planning staff for General Patton's Seventh Army.

Force 545. The Operation HUSKY planning staff for General Montgomery's Eighth Army.

Horsa glider. British paratrooper carrier that had a wingspan of approximately eighty feet, a length of approximately sixty feet, and could carry twenty-five paratroopers.

Oberbefehlshaber Süd, or OB South. The German supreme military commander in the Mediterranean theater of operations.

Oberkommando der Wehrmacht, or OKW. The German military high command, roughly equivalent to the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Seetransportfuehrer. The German sea transport leader in the Messina Strait.

U-boat. A German submarine.

Waco glider. American paratrooper carrier that had a wingspan of approximately eighty-four feet, a length of approximately forty-eight feet, and could carry thirteen paratroopers.

Wehrmachtfuehrungsstab. The operations section of the OKW staff.

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